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Progress in Vietnam with recommendations from the Black-faced Spoonbill Action Plan

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The coastal zone of the Red River Delta in northern Vietnam has been identified as an internationally important wintering site for several threatened water birds including the Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* which is categorized as "Critically Endangered" by Collar *et al.* (1994).

The Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve is the first Ramsar Site in Vietnam and is situated in the middle of Ba Lat delta which includes Con Lu, Con Ngan and Con Mo Islands. The Cua Day Estuary exits in the southern part of the delta, and Thai Binh and Van Us Estuaries are to the

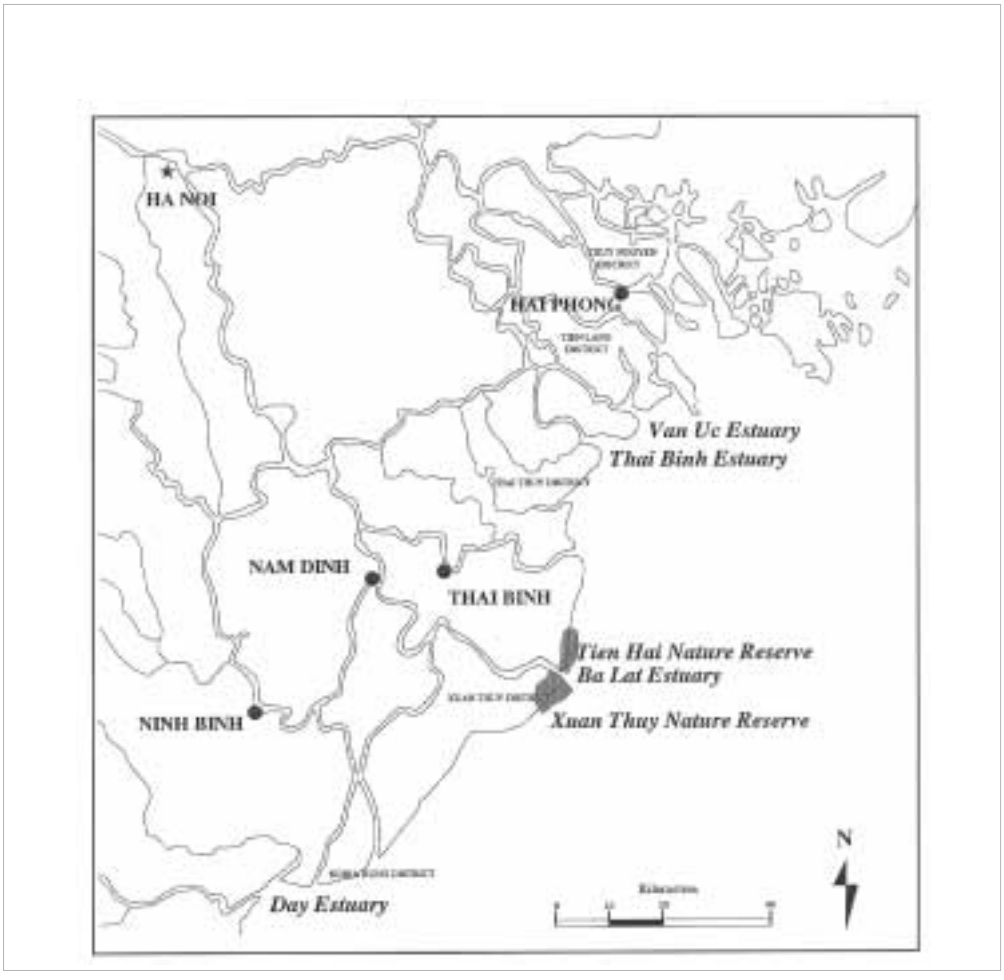

Fig. 1. Map of study area.

Table 1. Total number of Black-faced Spoonbill seen in four key sites within Red River Delta, Vietnam.

Site	1996		1997		1998	
	Feb. 5	Feb. 6	Mar. 7	Mar. 8	Jan. 17	Jan. 18
Xuan Thuy NR	75		44			59
Day Estuary	16		12		0	
Thai Binh Estuary		5		14		
Van Uc Estuary	8				0	
Total	104		70		59	

north of Xuan Thuy Reserve. In addition, the newly established Tien Hai Nature Reserve adjoins Xuan Thuy nature reserve to its north (Fig. 1). These are among seven key coastal wetlands in the Red River Delta, which have been identified by a joint BirdLife / FIPI (Forest Inventory and Planning Institute) project (Pedersen & Nguyen Huy Thang 1996).

Together with Taiwan and Hong Kong, Vietnam is one of the three major wintering areas of Black-faced Spoonbills in the region. This species has been recorded from Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve and other locations within the Red River Delta's estuaries with total recorded wintering populations of 104 individuals in 1996, 70 birds in 1997, and 59 birds in 1998 (Table 1).

Recommendations of the 1995 Action Plan

In the 1995 Action Plan for the Black-faced Spooonbill in Vietnam, 6 recommendations were made (Severinghaus *et al.* 1995):

A. Formal protection of Black-faced Spoonbills.

B. Simultaneous surveys at three known wintering sites.

C. Specific management recommendations for existing reserves.

D. Proposals for the establishment of new reserves.

E. Study of the compatibility of aquaculture with Black-faced spoonbills and of sustainable aquaculture techniques.

F. Surveys of coastal wetlands for unknown wintering sites of Black-faced Spoonbills.

Present status of the Recommendations

A. The Black-faced Spoonbill has not yet been protected under Vietnam Law (the Decision of the Council of Ministers on Jan 17, 1992), but it has been listed in the Red Data Book of Vietnam (MOSTE 1992).

B. In 1996, a project was conducted by BirdLife / FIPI with the aim of assisting the identification, evaluation and conservation of key wetland sites in the coastal zone of the Red River Delta. The project had the following objectives: 1) to review existing and planned conservation and development activities; 2) to to identify key coastal wetland sites for conservation; 3) to provisionally determine the impact of current resource use by communities and any further development plans in relation to threatened species and to make conservation management recommendations; 4) to explore potential provincial

interest in Nature Reserve establishment; 5) to produce a conservation strategy for key biodiversity sites; 6) to develop a proposal for a one-year project to undertake feasibility studies and management plans for priority sites, and 7) to provide training in survey and conservation assessment for Vietnamese scientific staff at central and provincial level. The results of the Bird Life / FIPI project in 1996 indicate that there are seven key coastal wetlands in the Red River Delta (Fig. 1). The most important single site for conservation is Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve; ranked second was the entire coast of Day Estuary in Nghia Hung District; ranked third were the sites in the Thai Binh Estury in Thai Binh and Tien Lang Districts and the Van Uc Estuary in Tien Lang District. All seven sites are threatened by aquacultural development and probably unsustainable levels of exploitation of marine products.

Recommendations for the conservation of these key sites are as follows:

(a)The management plan for Xuan Thuy and Tien Hai Nature Reserve should be fully revised to ensure that national protected area management legislation and international guidelines are closely followed.

(b)A management plan should be developed for the entire coastal zone of Nghia Hung District. This plan should seek to promote the sustainable use of marine resources, fully taking into account the importance of the mud-flats as a feeding area for threatened species and the offshore islands as a roosting area for migratory shorebirds.

(c)The unprotected site between the Thai Binh Estuary and Van Uc River mouth should be established as a nature reserve.

C. To-date only one protected area, Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve / Ramsar Site covering 16,000 ha (1% of the total delta area) has been fully established in the Red River Delta, an area which encompasses more than 1,700,000 ha, and the adjoining Tien Hai Nature Reserve, which is an area of rush fields, shrimp ponds, mangrove swamps, intertidal mudflats and low sandy islets at the mouth of the Red River. No more new aquaculture ponds should be created in Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve.

D. Following the results of the Birdlife / FIPI project mentioned above, the new BirdLife / FIPI Project first of all aims to complete a management plan for Thai Thuy Reserve located at Thai Binh Estuary.

E. In order to know whether aquaculture work is compatible with the conservation of Black-faced Spoonbills, the feeding sites of the spoonbills were studied. We found the spoonbills feed mainly in intertidal areas in the Red River Delta, the very areas favoured by shrimp farmers. More research is needed on sustainable aquaculture techniques to limit the demand on Black-faced Spoonbill feeding areas.

F. Much of the intertidal area of Cam Ranh Bay (Central Vietnam) has been destroyed by aquacultural development. It is still unknown if there is a wintering population of Black-faced Spoonbills in the Mekong Delta, except for an individual found in flock of Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala* in Dong Thap province in 1994.

In Vietnam we now know that Black-faced Spoonbills concentrate at three sites: Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve, the Day River Estuary, and the Thai Binh / Van Uc River Estuaries.

These populations require monitoring, in the form of monthly counts during the autumn, winter and spring months, to determine trends in the sizes of the populations, the proportion of immatures in the populations and threats to the species at these sites. Funding for this work is still needed.

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