

Spoon-billed Sandpiper survey in Mekong Delta 2015

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1. Introduction

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper (*Calidris pygmaea*) is one of the rarest migrant birds in the world. It is declining at an alarming rate and will become extinct within the next decade without our help. Recently surveys have found that Mekong delta coastal area holds an important population in winter migration (5-8 individuals, more than 1% global population), Nguyen Hoai Bao et al., 2013; Vladimir V. Morozov et al., 2012

As part of this programme Vietnam Wildlife Tours & Research in collaboration with University of Science, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh city have volunteered to conduct a survey in the Mekong from 16 to 22 January 2015. All travelling expense was funded by Viet Nature. An additional survey at Tan Thanh beach on January 31 was supported by Wildtour

2. Objectives

In this survey, we aimed to monitor number of Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SbS) can be found in Mekong delta and look for new suitable habitats. In addition, while looking for SbS we estimated number of other shorebird species.

3. Methods

The team observers have good bird-watching skill, all able to identify species easily. We used binoculars Nikon Monarch 8x42, Vortex 8x32 and Carl Zeiss 10x42 to observe, in addition 2 spotting scopes Kowa with 30X wide eyepiece and Carl Zeiss 15-56X eyepiece were used to look at the far/small birds.

Camera Nikon D300s attach with lens 300 f2.8 to take pictures for further identification check, several video clips were made by Nikon V1.

As most of waders feeding during low-tide and roosting during high-tide, we spent all low-tide time to search SbS along the shore/beach when tide was low and travel site to site during high-tide time. Exceptional, in Can Gio area where we found the main roosting sites at salt-pans so we attempted to count all these sites.

4. Sites selection and itinerary

There were 3 "old sites" that have been surveyed end of 2011 and end of 2013 and some other new visiting areas show in table below:

Table 1. Visiting sites during survey

Date	Survey area	Longitude	Latitude	Remark
January 16, 2014	Can Gio	10 ⁰ 23 37	106 ⁰ 56 5"	Old-site
January 17, 2014	Can Gio	10 ⁰ 23 37	106 ⁰ 56 5"	Old-site
January 18, 2014	Tan Thanh	10 ⁰ 16 24	106 ⁰ 45 53"	Old-site
January 19, 2014	Bac Lieu	09 ⁰ 12 12	105 ⁰ 44 32"	New-site
January 20, 2014	Cu Lao Dung, Soc Trang	09 ⁰ 31 50	106 ⁰ 16 38"	New-site
January 21, 2014	Tra Vinh	09 ⁰ 45 04	106 ⁰ 32 51"	New-site
January 22, 2014	Con Ngang & Tan Thanh	10 ⁰ 13 41	106 ⁰ 46 45"	Old-sites

Detailed itinerary

Day 1 - January 16th: We started our journey in the early morning, drove from Ho Chi Minh city to Can Gio and conducted survey at high-tide roosting areas from 09:00 am to 05:30 am.

Overnight in Can Thanh district

Day 2 - January 17th: This morning we counted shorebirds on Can Gio beach, till 11:00 when tide came up, we drove to Go Cong district for overnight stay

Day 3 - January 18th: Surveyed on Tan Thanh beach from 06:00 to 12:30 then drove to Soc Trang

Overnight in Soc Trang city

Day 4- January 19th: After an hour driving Soc Trang to Bac Lieu, we surveyed at Hiep Thanh beach, Bac Lieu then drove to Cu Lao Dung, Soc Trang, on the way, we stopped at Vinh Chau district.

Day 5 - January 20th: Early morning by boat to survey at An Thanh 3 commune, we found that the habitat was not possible for SbS so we decided to travel to Tra Vinh for pre-survey at Hiep Thanh commune, Duyen Hai district.

Day 6 – January 21st: After a full morning surveying at Hiep Thanh beach, we traveled to Tan Phu Dong district, Tien Giang.

Day 7 – January 22nd: Full morning at Con Ngang and the last hour was used for Tan Thanh again before went home.



Figure 1. Survey sites

4. Findings

There was no new site for Spoon-billed Sanderpiper founded in survey areas, it only occurred at Tan Thanh beach which 2 birds were observed on January 18th and 5 birds observed on January 22nd. On January 31st, additional survey by Nguyen Van Thang also observed 5 individuals at the same place.

5. Habitats description and other shorebirds

A. “Old sites”, see habitat description on report 2013

a. Can Gio

We did all roosting sites those were surveyed in 2013 and along the beach. Three Chinese Egrets (VU) were seen on the beach while number of wader seem less than previous.



Figure 2. Chinese Egret at Can Gio – photo: Nguyen Hoai Bao

Table 2. Birds count in Can Gio area

Species	Total counted
Chinese Egret	3
Kentish Plover	115
Pied Fantail	2
Golden-bellied Gerygone	3
Germain Swiflet	Common
Barn Swallow	Common
Plain Prinia	6
Yellow-bellied Prinia	8
Black-browed Reed Warbler	4
Oriental Reed Warbler	2
Curlew Sandpiper	5
Greater Sandplover	550
Lesser Sand Plover	100
Bar-tailed Godwit	20
Rudy Turnstone	30
Grey Plover	37
Little Stint	33
Marsh Sandpiper	6
Common Greenshank	9
Little Egret	7
Chinese Pond Heron	1
Collared Kingfisher	6

Great Egret	1
Scaly-breasted Munia	18
Slaty-breasted Rail	1
Yellow-vented Bulbul	4
Vinous-breasted Starling	1
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker	4
Olive-backed Sunbird	6
Black-winged Stilt	12
Long-toed Stint	2
Red-necked Stint	3
Common Redshank	1
Whimper	45
Oriental Skylark	3
Dunlin	1
Common Sandpiper	4
Terek Sandpiper	4

b. Tan Thanh, Go Cong

Table 3. Birds count at Tan Thanh, Go Cong

Species	Total counted
Curlew Sandpiper	11
Common Greenshank	25
Greater Sand Plover	80
Terek Sandpiper	42
Little Egret	41
Bar-tailed Godwit	10
Broad-billed Sandpiper	3
Little Stint	35
Eurasian Curlew	12
Kentish Plover	60
Pacific Golden Plover	15
Caspian Tern	30
Spoon-billed Sandpiper	*

(*) 2 individuals on January 18, 5 individuals on January 22 and 5 individuals on January 31



Figure 3. SbS habitat at Tan Thanh beach



Figure 4. SbS & Red-necked Stint at Tan Thanh on January 22 – photo: Nguyen Hoai Bao



Figure 5. SbS at Tan Thanh on January 31 – photo: Nguyen Van Thang

c. Con Ngang, Go Cong

Table 4. Birds count at Con Ngang

Species	Total counted
Whimbrel	38
Eurasian Curlew	21
Terek Sandpiper	15
Kentish Plover	90
Bar-tailed Godwit	50
Sanderling	6
Sandplover	80
Caspian Tern	83
Little Stint	16
Broad-billed Sandpiper	4
Great Egret	32
Little Egret	11
Pond Heron	4
Grey Heron	2
Collared Kingfisher	14
Osprey	1

B. New sites

With hope to find new distribution sites of Spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Mekong delta coastal, we attempted at visiting several sites that has not been surveyed before. However, there was no any suitable habitat for SbS neither for many other waders. All new-sites listed as table 1, very few birds were seen although the shore looks nice. We don't know reason why, perhaps those sites locate to far south (?). In Bac Lieu and Soc Trang, the habitats are very soft-mud, which are not useful to SbS while in Tra Vinh, we found that too hard and sandy.



Figure 6. Soft and muddy beach in Bac Lieu



Figure 7. Soft beach in Soc Trang



Figure 8. Mangrove in Cu Lao Dung, Soc Trang



Figure 9. Sandy beach in Tra Vinh

Table 5. Birds count in Bac Lieu

Species	Total counted
Common Greenshank	23
Greater Sand Plover	20
Kentish Plover	30
Grey Plover	16
Eurasian Curlew	5
Terek Sandpiper	1

Species	Total counted
Common Greenshank	40
Pond Heron	20

Little Egret	5
Kentish Plover	20
Greater Sand Plover	10
Osprey	1
Eurasian Curlew	4
Common Sandpiper	1
Grey-faced Buzzard	1
Black-shoulder Kite	1
Blue-tailed Bee-eater	5
Green Bee-eater	12
Plaintive Cuckoo	1
Scaly-breasted Munia	13
Streak-eared Bulbul	2