Spoonbills Speak

echoes across the Pacific

The Official Newsletter of SAVE (Spoonbill Action Voluntary Echo) International

Vol. 16 / Issue 1 A Project of Earth Island Institute **Fall 2013**

2013 BLACK-FACED SPOONBILL CENSUS

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society has released the results of the 2013 International Black-faced Spoonbill Census. In the ten years since this international effort began, the number of birds counted has more than doubled, from 1,113 in 2003 to over 2,700 in 2013! As usual, the count in Taiwan was more than half of the total.

BirdLife International posted a hopeful yet cautious response: "A lack of baseline data makes identifying a population trend problematic, but if the apparent recent increases are confirmed as genuine, the species may warrant downlisting in the future."

Despite these rising numbers, growth has not been smooth. There was an unexplained dip of 700 birds in 2011, and the overall numbers mask the trends in individual countries – Japan's count has continually increased, while Vietnam's has dropped.

On top of it all, it is unclear whether the population is truly increasing, whether the surveyors are becoming better at finding birds, or worse, whether birds are being displaced from damaged or destroyed habitat (BirdLife International).

This uncertainty highlights the importance of continued monitoring and vigilance by organizations like SAVE International to bring together conservation efforts and protect critical habitat for Black-faced Spoonbills all along the flyway.

-BY TAMI CHURCH

LA 205 STUDIO: SEA LEVEL RISE IN TAIWAN

The climate is changing and sea levels are rising around the world; for the low-lying southwest coast of Taiwan, even a small rise in sea level could mean big problems for people and endangered Black-faced Spoonbills alike. With thoughtful science-based plans and deliberate action, however, Taiwan could turn this imminent crisis into a resilient environmental and economic future by expanding its "wetland breadbasket", a coastal landscape both protective and productive. This was the challenge that SAVE International recently put before graduate students in the Environmental Planning studio (LA205) in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning (LAEP) at the University of California, Berkeley. SAVE has been collaborating with LA205 since 1997 on spoonbill-related topics in Taiwan, Japan, and Korea.

This year, LAEP Chair Matt Kondolf invited SAVE to lead the project. SAVE's team of teachers included Professors Randy Hester and Marcia McNally, and LAEP alumni Derek Schubert (President of SAVE) and Wan-chih Yin. Professor Hsiao-wen Wang and doctoral candidate Pin-Han Kuo as well as other allies in Taiwan provided valuable maps, studies, cultural insights, and translation of documents from Chinese to English. The nine students worked in four teams, each looking at a segment of the southwestern coastline. Sea-level rise will likely continue for centuries, but the instructors asked each team to propose a phased plan through the year 2100.

Team 1 studied northern Yunlin County, at the mouth of the Joshui River. Aquaculture and industry are drawing groundwater at unsustainable rates, causing the land to subside and become more vulnerable to flooding. Petrochemical Plant #6 occupies an artificial peninsula built in the 1990s but is already becoming obsolete. The plant has polluted the nearby waters and has blocked the river's natural sediments from replenishing the southern barrier-islands. The team proposed a phased approach of adopting different aquaculture crops that need less fresh water, establishing mangrove forests for wildlife habitat and ecotourism, reshaping the peninsula, and eventually repurposing the petrochemical plant as a wind-energy farm.

SAVE Members Review LA 205 Student Work
Photo Credit: Marcia McNally

Team 2 studied Chiayi County, where rapid subsidence is putting many small villages and historic burial grounds in the path of the rising sea. The team calculated how far and how fast the coastline would move, showing the urgency with which the local residents must act. Their plan offered a range of alternatives, from armoring edges or raising villages to allow continued habitation, to deliberately abandoning areas to the rising waters and resettling on higher ground. The team looked to Beimen, an important local center, as an example of how a village could adjust to a new existence as an island.

Team 3 studied Tainan County, already home to the largest wintertime population of Black-faced Spoonbills. Formerly an intricate coastline of shifting barrier-islands, this area changed radically in the last century through a series of dikes and landfill projects. The team rejected both the do-nothing option and the business-as-usual option of building seawalls, but instead proposed a plan that embraces change in a dynamic island landscape, with new sustainable agriculture and other industries inland, and a natural buffer of wildlife habitat along the advancing coastline. Local villagers in the path of the rising sea would find safer ground and better opportunities awaiting them in nearby towns such as Jiali.

Team 4 studied the area around Da Peng ("big bird") Bay in Pingtung County, the agricultural center of southern Taiwan. The wetlands around the bay already provide prolific habitat for many birds. The team proposed diversifying the economy into scientific/high-tech businesses and tourism, including extending the bay's wetlands northward as waters rise and the bay expands.

As with past LA205 studios, these plans are not idle academic exercises, but they could affect real places and real people. Some of the students intend to present their plans at the next conference of the Pacific Rim Democratic Design Network, scheduled for Taiwan in March 2014, which will be a great opportunity for these rising environmental leaders to present their work, as well as for the people and birds of southwestern Taiwan to start responding to sea-level rise.

-BY DEREK SCHUBERT

FUKUOKA UPDATE: PARK-PLANNING PROBLEMS

Thanks to the successful symposium and workshop led by SAVE International in Fukuoka in November 2011, citizens and local officials recognized that the proposed Wild Bird Park on Island City would be an important part of Fukuoka's Biodiversity Strategy. One of the city's vice-mayors particularly appreciated SAVE's work; after attending all parts of the symposium and workshop, he understood the need for at least 16 hectares (ha) of habitat for various wild birds, including the Black-faced Spoonbill (BFS). He and his colleagues therefore budgeted for a series of public workshops to create a master plan for the park, starting in Fukuoka's 2012 fiscal year (April 2012 to March 2013). The first workshop was held in September 2012, and two more workshops and a field trip followed before the end of March 2013. Two other workshops have followed since April 2013. The next (sixth) workshop is planned for September, when a new "expert commission" will deliberate on the citizens' ideas. They intend to release a final master plan in March 2014.

But the workshops have been clouded with problems. The vice-mayor who was so sympathetic to SAVE left the city government in March 2012, and the new official in charge of the workshops has refused to present the alternative plans by SAVE and Fukuoka University. He claims that these plans are based on inadequate information and would bias the citizens from a proper democratic participation process. Ironically, though, he has withheld from the public workshops several pieces of critical scientific information about the habitat and biology of wild birds, which the citizens would need in order to make their own plan. Local pro-bird activists and other citizens have insisted that the organizers of the workshops provide better information. Saturo Matsumoto, of the SAVE Executive Committee, took matters into his own hands by organizing a field trip to the Kirara Hama Nature Observation Park in Yamaguchi City, where the participants saw how big and how diverse a plot of habitat must be to attract wild birds. Nevertheless, at the fourth workshop (April 2013), the city official presented a "new" master plan, which was almost identical to a plan devised in 2006 by the Exploratory Committee of the Basic Plan for a Wild Bird Park -- a plan only 12 ha in size, not 16 ha as agreed on at the 2011 symposium and workshop.

The members of the SAVE Executive Committee and our colleagues in Fukuoka do not understand why this city official and his fellow organizers are refusing to share the important scientific information that supports the need for at least 16 ha of habitat to support wild birds, including the BFS, and why they are promoting an outdated plan. We would like to get to the bottom of the situation, so SAVE has sent an

SAVE and Colleagues in Japan Observe Spoonbills at Imazu Tidal Flat during the November 2011 Workshop and Symposium
Photo Credit: Fiona Cundy

open letter to the mayor and vice-mayors of Fukuoka, to the city officials in charge of the citizen workshops, and to other international organizations concerned with bird habitat and wetlands (such as IUCN, Ramsar, and the EAAF Partnership).

-BY TAMESUKE NAGAHASHI

BUDAI REPORT

In May Tsai Fuchang took Marcia McNally and Randy Hester on a tour of projects recently completed in the Budai BFS stepping stone area. The projects are part of Fuchang's "Wetlands Breadbasket" concept, and are sites where SAVE has worked collaboratively with local people and National Taiwan University. The Shin Tsen Elementary School continues to innovate in hands-on, life-long learning. Under the direction of Dr. Chen Chang-po there is now a wet lab in the school where faculty, students, and tourists on "working holiday" are learning to create habitat for the horseshoe crab. The crab, which has been almost entirely extirpated locally, is the newest highlight of ecotourism. A bird watching tower has just been completed next to the school. It is a replica of the gun tower built to prevent salt theft from Budai salt pans. The tower offers extraordinary 3-story views over Budai waters, essential habitat for the BFS. On January 8, 2013 260 spoonbills were reported in these salt flats making this one of the most important sites in the successful expansion of the bird's habitat. After late May rains immature spoonbills relocated temporarily 2 kilometers away to a shallower salt flat which is not within the National Scenic Area jurisdiction. SAVE must mobilize a campaign to include protection for these sizable wetlands that are now understood to be seasonally essential for endangered and endemic birds.

-BY RANDY HESTER

SAVE CONTINUES PARTNERSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES IN CHINA

With the founding of the SAVE Shanghai chapter and further partnerships with Shanghai Jiao Tong University, SAVE International has been strengthening its contacts in mainland China. The coastline of China makes up the long middle stetch of the Black-faced Spoonbill's migratory flyway and includes many sites of crucial habitat for the species. In the Yangtze River Delta just north of Shanghai, for example, Chongming Island has large areas of wetland and very restrictive policies on development. Given the presence of spoonbills and other bird species on Chongming Island, a critical mass of SAVE members in Shanghai have formed a local chapter. Shanghai Jiao Tong University professor Shan Yin, one of the leaders in the SAVE chapter, has introduced his students to various spoonbill-related issues, and one of them has chosen to focus on Black-faced Spoonbills as a master's thesis topic. In the Dong Tan National Nature Reserve on Chongming Island, a group of professors and graduate students form Shanghai Jiao Tong University analyzed the relationship between between water depth and area, and the populations of different bird species, based on observed data and the rasterizing method. Their research marks important progress in rationalizing the design and planning of habitat for the Black-faced Spoonbill in China. We look forward to reporting further progress from SAVE members and allies in Shanghai.

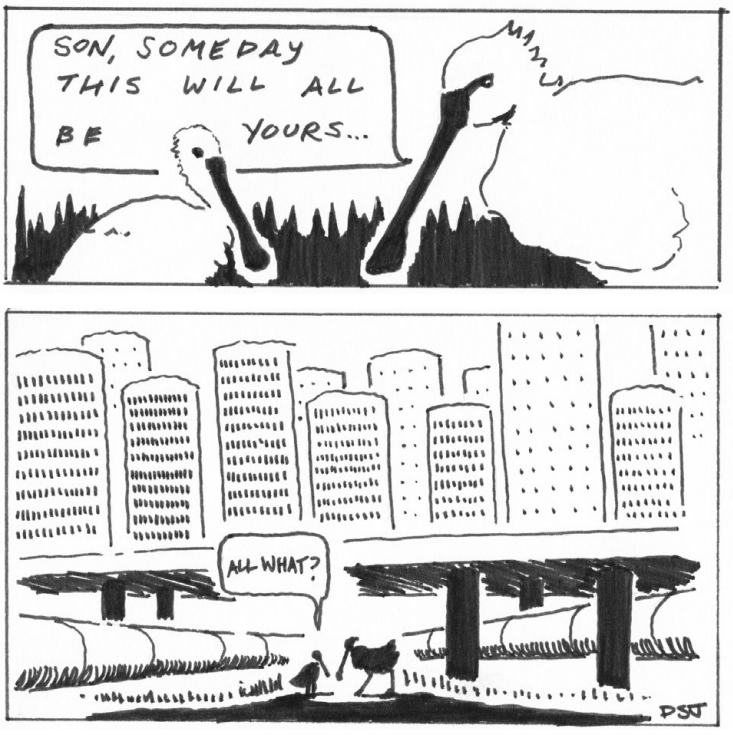
-BY JING MA & DEREK SCHUBERT

TAIWAN WINS AWARD FOR PRESERVING SPOONBILL HABITAT

For its efforts to preserve the endangered Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), Taiwan has recently received the "International Conservation Achievement Award" from BirdLife International, a UK-based global partnership of conservation organizations that strives to save birds and their habitats. Taiwan received this award based on its successful model for preserving the spoonbill, including education and creation of new wetland habitat. SAVE International has played a key role in developing plans for this habitat expansion, including the five stepping-stone habitats that anchor new conservation reserves along the southwest coast. Nationwide, Taiwan's 89 conservation reserves occupy nearly 20 percent of the country's land. The award is a testament to Taiwan's and SAVE's continuing efforts to bring this bird back from the brink of extinction in the 1990s.

-BY KELLY JANES

A NOTE FROM CHI-CHAO



-BY DARRYL JONES

Malcom Coulter teaching SAVE members in the field
Photo Credit: Marcia McNally

SAVE MOURNS LOSS OF LEAD SCIENTIST, *MALCOLM COULTER*

Malcolm Coulter, the lead scientist in SAVE International's battles to bring the Black-faced Spoonbill back from the brink of extinction, died on January 2, 2013. Dr. Coulter was co-chair of the IUCN Stork, Ibis and Spoonbill Specialist Group and from 1997 until his death a SAVE Advisory Committee member. For over a decade Malcolm worked with environmental planners and landscape architects to develop plans for habitat expansion throughout the bird's flyway. He applied his singular accumulated knowledge to the spoonbill habitat conservation plan jointly developed by the University of California, Berkeley and National Taiwan University. When other scientists concluded that the Binnan Industrial Complex would have no impact on the spoonbill's primary wintering habitat, Dr. Coulter challenged them with precise spatial metrics that showed undeniable detrimental effects. On the basis of Coulter's science Binnan was defeated. In Taiwan alone he contributed the spatial ornithology that guided the creation of five stepping stone habitats resulting in the population revival from an extinction vortex low of several hundred spoonbills to almost 2700 birds in 2012.

SAVE has known no other scientist who so seamlessly could work with land use planners and community designers in so many cultures to create scientifically-based plans. He will be missed; he can never be replaced. Upon word of his death SAVE members around the world paid tribute to Dr. Coulter reflecting the breadth of his reach in saving the spoonbill:

> *The birding community has lost one of its best.*
> *He was our most important ally in the science community without whom the movement would not have succeeded.*
> *His Black-faced Spoonbill friends of the world grieve.*
> *I learned important knowledge from his lectures about the Black-faced Spoonbill; he was a fantastic educator about ecology.*
> *Malcolm was a nerdy kind of guy, but very friendly, nice, and often funny. He was always a delight as part of a team here in Taiwan. We will miss him, but we will carry on with a lasting memory of his contributions.*

Dr. Coulter held degrees from Stanford, Oxford, and the University of Pennsylvania. He was always at odds with invasive plants and predators and spent his career trying to overcome habitat loss. In his early years he carried out research on birds and plants on the Farallon Islands in

Malcolm Coulter Presenting at a Taiwan Congressional Hearing
Photo Credit: Randy Hester

California, devising plans to control invasives in order to maintain a rare ecosystem. He worked at the Darwin Research Center in an effort to conserve the Dark-rumped Petrel. At the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory he led a program to create habitat for the American Wood Stork. He worked for years on conservation efforts for the Oriental White Stork and Oriental Crested Ibis. Dr. Coulter posthumously received the Pacific Seabird Group's Lifetime Conservation Award from Birdlife International for the effort he had so long worked for to protect habitat for the Black-faced Spoonbill.

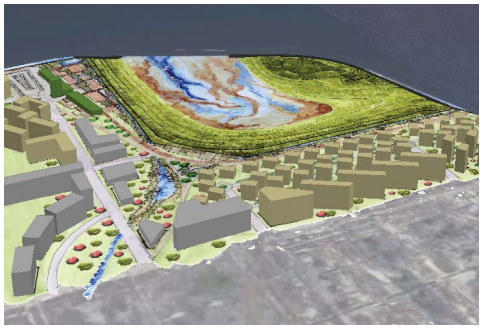
Ornithology Exchange reported on Malcolm Coulter's "Last Testament, December 9, 2012." It is classic Malcolm, ranking up there with the truism he often began his lectures, "The Black-faced Spoonbill is the rarest of all spoonbills…" In Dr. Coulter's words, "LIFE is the most wonderful thing in this world…If it weren't for LIFE, none of us would exist." He went on to say, "There are four or more aspects of our lives that are most important: Honesty, Loving, Caring, Humor…"

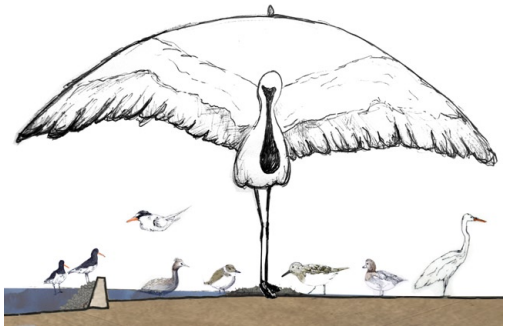
Those of us at SAVE experienced all four of his core characteristics. The fact that Malcolm looked and from time-to-time acted like an elder Dennis the Menace reinforced his belief in the value of humor. He extended irresistible love and caring attention to every member of the SAVE team. And of course Malcolm's honesty sometimes upset our impulsive activists' applecart. Exact science was his trade but he never shunned radical activists. He knew the ultimate value of his role: to keep us scientifically informed and honest. He would never tolerate our overreaching on the basis of his science. "No I didn't say that exactly" often curbed our jumps to conclusion. We inspired his science, but activism never tainted his scientific honesty. His precise science, therefore, informed our plans and actions in unique ways which largely explains the success of his work to save the spoonbill in Taiwan. But unlike most scientists he contributed to dramatic innovations by working so effectively with us. In Taiwan when other scientists created questionable findings to support governmental agendas, when they distanced themselves from environmental activists and dismissed SAVE, Dr. Coulter worked the political inside and outside. He was astute but patient. And he expected honesty in every action.

These values of honesty, loving, caring, and humor kept him going. There was no other immediate gratification for one who saw the big picture and the long-term on a low budget beyond the daily joy he shared with those with whom he worked. So it is again classic Malcolm to conclude his testament thus, "It's not what individuals can do but what we can all do together!"

-BY RANDY HESTER

Malcolm Coulter with SAVE Member Jeff Hou
Photo Credit: Randy Hester





SAVE IS 16!

Dear SAVE Members:

Every year has its challenges and its opportunities and the past 12 months have been no different. We are keeping a close eye on the Fukuoka wild bird park situation and are very grateful for our members of SAVE's Fukuoka chapter for their upfront involvement in this process. As the newsletter was going to press we learned about a new, critical issue in southern Taiwan, which involves building a road through the Jiading Wetland that last year hosted 154 Black-faced Spoonbills. We fired off a letter yesterday but expect you will be reading about this issue in our next newsletter. However SAVE is very excited about the 2013 Berkeley student work and the upcoming Taiwan conference. As mentioned, it will be held in March 2014. There will be an opportunity to present in situ in Shin-tsen, and our goal is to send at least 10 U.S. SAVE members to participate. To accomplish this we need to raise $6000 which will augment the other funds available for travel to Taiwan, accommodations, and conference fees. So we need your help.

We hope you will renew your annual membership to SAVE, or join us if you don't have a membership. Thank you for your support!

____ I would like to renew my membership for _____ ($25, 50, $100, $250, $500)

____ I would like to join SAVE as:

- ____ a sponsoring member of SAVE for $25
- ____ a contributor to the spoonbills' nest egg for $50
- ____ an adoptive grandparent of a spoonbill for $100
- ____ an adoptive parent of a spoonbill for $250
- ____ adopter of an entire spoonbill family for $500

____ I would like to make an additional, one-time contribution to help send the SAVE team to the Taiwan conference

Please return to: SAVE International, c/o Earth Island Institute, 2150 Allston Way Suite 460, Berkeley, CA, 94704. Make your check payable to SAVE/EII. You can also donate through the SAVE website: earthisland.org/save/donate. Just click on the "donate" link.

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