Spoonbills Speak

echoes across the Pacific

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

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BLACK-FACED SPOONBILL POPULATION GROWS AGAIN, NEARS 5,000 MARK

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) has released its report of the 2020 International Black-faced Spoonbill (BFS) Census. Counts done from 17-19 January 2020 revealed a total of 4,864 individuals, a 9% increase from 2019 (4,463 birds). Spoonbills were found at 88 sites out of 128 surveyed.

The census is held in mid-winter, when the wintering populations of spoonbills are stable and because the tides are easier to navigate. The census employs local birdwatchers, conservationists, researchers, ornithologists, and nature reserve staff; all volunteers. The data are compiled and summarized regionally but the international coordinator analyzes the results and writes the final report later in the year.

The first count (1989-1990) tallied only 288 spoonbills, when only ornithologists and birders knew about them, but by the end of the 1990s, the BFS had become a conservation success story in eastern Asia. What accounts for the dramatic increase over the past 30 years? Part of the story is habitat conservation. In Taiwan, numbers reached a new high this year (2,785). No doubt the successful fight to stop the Binnan petrochemical plant in the 1990s and early 2000s created the context for this to happen. The Southwest Coast National Scenic Area was designated in 2003, and the Taijiang National Park in 2009, both with mandates to protect bird habitat. Some biologists have theorized that the BFS population was stable at 5,000 to 10,000 birds before crashing below 300 in the 1980s, but have not determined the cause or exact timing of the crash.

Some factors are tempering our optimism over the rising population. Yat-tung Yu, census organizer for HKBWS, issued a call of "global conservation concern" over the wetlands in the Pearl River estuary, including Deep Bay (Hong Kong and Shenzhen) and Macao; their quality is declining due to development and the BFS population there has decreased 22% over the past decade. Also, dozens of spoonbill chicks this year at Suhaam Rock, Korea, have not survived (see related article in this issue), and their loss will set back the growth of the BFS population in years to come.

Download the report (PDF): https://tinyurl.com/BFSCensus2020

-BY MARCIA McNALLY

BIG QUESTIONS FOR BAEKRYEONG: LATEST CHALLENGE FOR LA205 STUDIO

The island of Baekryeong holds an outsized position in Korea's political and ecological conflicts, so it was an ideal subject for SAVE's latest collaboration with the University of California (UC) Berkeley, and Birds Korea. In February-March 2020, a team of eight graduate students at UC Berkeley's LA205 Environmental Planning Studio analyzed the many-layered issues at Baekryeong and devised alternatives to two proposed projects. Dr. Nial Moores of Birds Korea has been working for many years to protect important habitat on Baekryeong and elsewhere in Korea; he has documented roughly 200 species of birds on Baekryeong, and he brought the conflicts to SAVE's attention. (Baek-ryeong has two syllables and is sometimes spelled and pronounced Baeng-nyeong, or spelled with the first letter "P" instead of "B".) Dr. G. Mathias (Matt) Kondolf led the studio in Berkeley in consultation with a visiting Korean government official and several members of the SAVE Executive Committee, as well as Dr. Moores and his colleagues in Korea. SAVE has been guiding new research and planning in the LA205 studio every year since 1997.

The westernmost spot in South Korea, Baekryeong serves as a vital stopover site along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway for thousands of migrating birds, including rare species such as the Chinese Egret, Oriental Stork, and Black-faced Spoonbill; hosts a South Korean military base because of its strategic importance

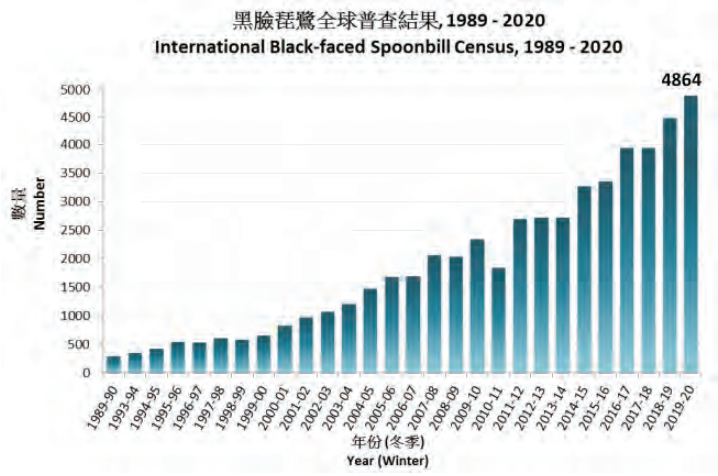


Image credit: SAVE adaptation of HKBWS original

near the border with North Korea; was the arrival point in Korea for Christian missionaries in the 1800s; and has a picturesque landscape of forested hills, agricultural fields, and rugged rocky coasts. Around 5,000 people reside on the island, but more than 300,000 tourists each year visit from the mainland for the scenery, religious pilgrimage, and the chance to see North Korea with the naked eye. High-speed ferry boats take four hours from Incheon, but the operators often cancel trips because of dense fog around the island, especially in summer.

Two projects were threatening Baekryeong's environment and culture: an airport and a "Bible Land" theme park. The central government of South Korea proposed an airport, ostensibly to spur tourism by shortening the trip from the mainland. For that same place on the island, however, leaders of several Christian churches were raising funds to build "Bible Land", inspired by similar developments in the United States. Each project's proponents did not acknowledge the other's proposal, nor the shortage of fresh drinking water already afflicting the residents. Baekryeong's central reservoir, a dammed natural lagoon, has water that is too polluted to drink, and even the groundwater pumped into houses sometimes flows brown instead of clear.

Dr. Moores asked SAVE and the LA205 studio to analyze these threats and propose alternatives. In the supporting documents for the airport, SAVE and the students found unrealistic projections of tourism, no accounting for noise and pollution on the residents or the birds, and no mention of fog preventing flights. Baekryeong residents today may never see or hear an airplane in the sky, but the airport documents predicted an average of 30 turboprop airplanes flying to the island each day, and growing every year without limit. When the students examined the precedents of similar religious theme parks in the U.S., they found only failures, especially in cold-winter locations as at Baekryeong.

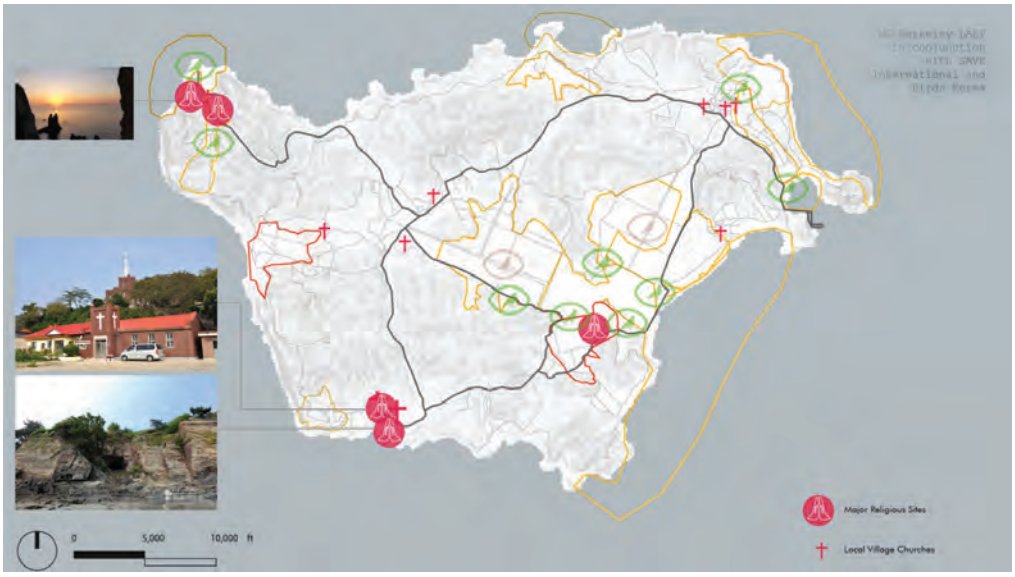
The LA205 students worked in two teams. Both teams rejected the airport, in favor of a new generation of high-speed ferries. One team proposed a dispersed network of attractions -- religious, ecological, and cultural -- each tailored to its setting and connected by shuttle busses. The other team proposed a central "sanctuary" campus for religious tourists and scholars, including gardens and a museum, in a valley of relatively low value as bird habitat. To secure adequate drinking water, both teams proposed capturing clean rainwater from the roofs of buildings, based on successful precedents from other villages in Korea. Fortunately, Baekryeong is rainiest during the summer tourist season.

Online collaboration was much more important this year than in the past, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although SAVE often uses video-conferencing to work remotely, UC Berkeley and most other schools in California had closed campuses by mid-March and moved all instruction online. Even the local Berkeley classmates could not meet in person for the last week of the project.

The LA205 students provided their work to Dr. Moores to present to audiences around Baekryeong Island, since any successful plan must include the voices of local residents. Although SAVE has heard no news about the airport, we are already optimistic. In April, Dr. Moores and his colleague Choony Kim (a leader with the Korean environmental group KFEM) met with the chief proponents of Bible Land and reported this good news to SAVE: "They love the concept … [T]he 2018 version of [B]ible [L]and looks to have been stopped dead in its tracks; and discussions will now move towards designs aiming at helping create a Resilient Baekryeong."

-BY DEREK SCHUBERT

"Centralized" Development Proposal, Baekryeong, Korea
Image credit: LA205 (Yiwen Chen, Dana Clark, Kendall Harris, Shauna Wright)



"Dispersed" Development Proposal, Baekryeong, Korea
Image credit: LA205 (Alev Bilginsoy, Adam Dickenson, Vanessa Lee Ying Chik, Xiaoyue Wang)

YEKANG KO, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, EARNS TENURE AND RESEARCH AWARD

SAVE International congratulates Dr. Yekang Ko on receiving tenure at the University of Oregon, as well as a promotion to Associate Professor this past Spring. Based at the Eugene campus, Yekang focuses her teaching curriculum and research on urban sustainability, energy landscapes, landscape planning and analysis, and the "conflict of greens." Yekang completed a Ph.D. in Landscape Architecture & Environmental Planning at the University of California at Berkeley in 2012 and has been a steady force and tenacious researcher for SAVE International's work.

In addition to these noteworthy accomplishments, Yekang received the 2020 Excellence in Research and Creative Work Award, Junior Level. The Council of Educators in Landscape Architecture (CELA) confers this award to honor a faculty member's outstanding, innovative, and noteworthy research and/or creative works related to the Landscape Architecture discipline.

Roxi Thoren, Department Head in Landscape Architecture at the University of Oregon, praised Yekang as "an absolutely wonderful colleague who, in addition to conducting important research on the tradeoffs between sustainable energy practices and habitat preservation, has already taken important leadership roles in the department as director of undergraduate studies, and in the university and beyond as the program manager for the APRU [Association of Pacific Rim Universities] Sustainable Cities and Landscapes research hub."

-BY FIONA CUNDY

Dr. Yekang Ko receives recognition for her research
Photo credit: Yekang Ko

Dumujin Peace Park Proposal, Baekryeong, Korea
Image credits: design by LA205 (Alev Bilginsoy, Adam Dickenson, Vanessa Lee Ying Chik, Xiaoyue Wang); photos by Nial Moores, Birds Korea

GRADUATE THESIS PROBES TAIWAN'S SOLAR ENERGY "CONFLICT OF GREENS"

William Lien has completed his master's project at the Universty of Oregon, under the supervision of Professor Yekang Ko. The title of his thesis is "A Landscape Approach to the Conflicts of 'Greens': Planning for Energy and Wetland Land-Use Growth in Southwestern Taiwan's Coastal Landscape in a Climate-Changing Era".

William is one of the leading members of Jiading Wetland Youth (JWY) in Kaohsiung on the southwestern coast of Taiwan. JWY began with a campaign against building new roads in the sensitive habitat of the Jiading Wetland, and expanded its purview regionally in recent years. The government of Taiwan launched a plan in 2017 to expand nationwide generation of solar energy to 20 gigawatts by 2025, including rooftop photovoltaics and ground-level photovoltaics, which triggered numerous land-use conflicts and public debates. JWY has advocated for regional development that supports the aquacultural economy and preserves ecological networks in the southwestern coastal landscape. William's project is one of the documents tackling this issue.

William's research compared a "business-as-usual" (or "expansion") scenario with an "adaptation" scenario, using the recommendation of two different zoning methods from key literature and applied with the alternative future method. Each scenario implied different actions, considering the growth in land use for solar energy, the increasing flood risk, and the preservation of habitat for the Black-faced Spoonbill. William's study evaluated both scenarios for their land-use efficiency, energy generation, and carbon emissions. William emphasized that the adaptation scenario cannot be realized without innovative policy tools of land-use planning, such as land exchanges and land consolidation. This research concluded that the adaptation scenario, using standard-based zoning, would lag behind the reduction in carbon emissions of the expansion scenario by 2040 but would catch up by 2060, while allowing more efficient land use and preserving more critical habitat.

The thesis can be read at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bc3Jm4QRkqdEylXsxB6Dnad57PCGlTyv

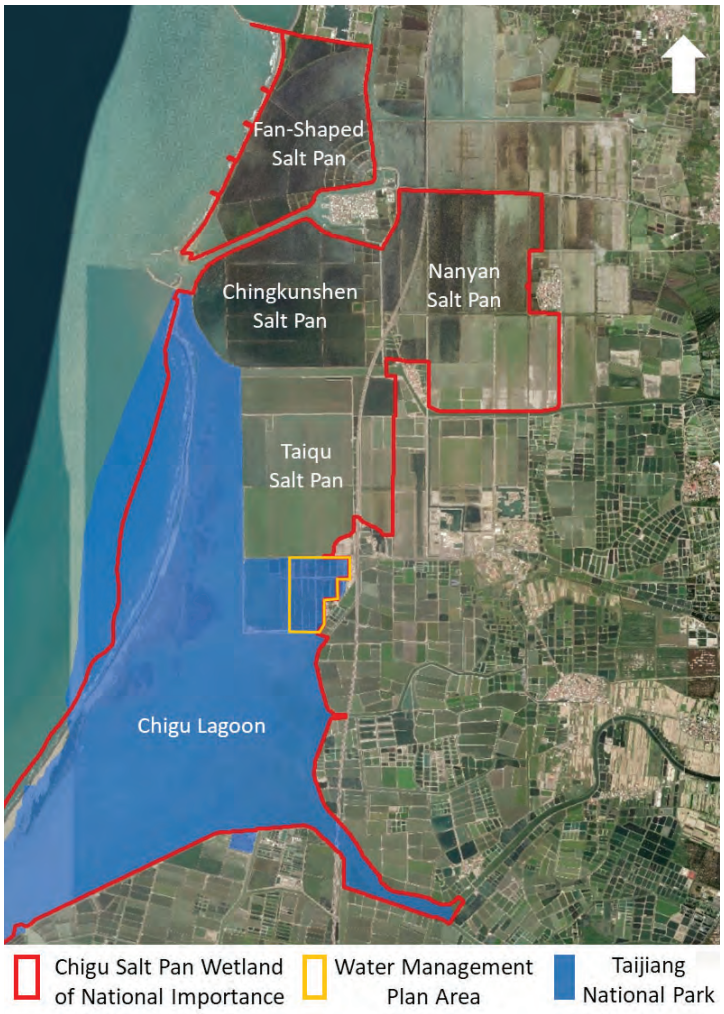
- BY FIONA CUNDY

Major Conflicts of Greens Controversies in Taiwan
Image credit: William Lien

NEW PLAN FOR WATER MANAGEMENT AT CHIGU'S TAIQU SALT PAN INCORPORATES LOCAL VOICES

A team of hydraulic engineers and ecologists worked with local villagers to produce a plan that will improve wetland habitat in a portion of Taijiang National Park, through the active management of water. The park's official boundary has been amended to include the southernmost part of Taiqu Salt Pan, which is in the Chigu (Cigu) Salt Pan Wetland, a wetland of national importance in Tainan City. Taijiang National Park hired a team that includes hydraulic engineers (led by Dr. Hsiao-Wen Wang of the Water Sustainability Lab from National Cheng Kung University) and ecologists (led by Dr. Yuh-Wen Chiu of National Chiayi University) to survey and analyze a portion of Southern Taiqu Salt Pan to understand the current condition of the site, and propose a water management plan for the rehabilitation and conservation of wetland habitat. The plan relied heavily on participatory planning with the community of Yancheng Village located alongside Taiqu Salt Pan, including close input and discussion with the village leader and the operator of the gates in the channel that connect the village and salt pan to outside channels. Taijiang National Park has asked for a short-term plan that can be initiated in Fall 2020. This includes work on the opening and creating of channels in the salt pan wetland to improve water flow and connectivity, which is expected to occur in September and October of 2020. Water management operations for the dry season would begin in Spring 2021.

- BY ADRIENNE DODD AND PO-HSIU KUO



Boundaries of Chigu Salt Pan, Taijiang National Park, and new water management plan for South Taiqu Salt Pan
Map credit: NCKU Water Sustainability Lab

Vision of Southern Taiqu Salt Pan following the strategy adopted by Taijiang National Park, Fall 2020
Map credit: Po-Hsiu Kuo with support from NCKU Water Sustainability Lab

Suhaam Rock, Korea
Photo credit: Hea Jin Park

OWLS VS. SPOONBILLS AT SUHAAM

The latest news about the Black-faced Spoonbill (BFS) in Korea is unfortunately not good. The breeding of BFS has failed this year at Suhaam Rock in Yeongjong-do, Incheon, South Korea. Suhaam is an artificial rock that is known as a representative habitat for Black-faced Spoonbills. According to the city of Incheon on August 13, spoonbills made 40 nests on Suhaam, and about 50 chicks hatched this year, but only 10 of them have grown normally. For comparison, about 50 chicks hatched here last year and almost all of them grew normally.

The reason for this year's problem is the Eurasian Eagle-owl (*Bubo bubo*). Eurasian Eagle-owls were photographed on an unmanned sensor camera installed by the Korea Water Bird Network inside Suhaam. Although Eurasian Eagle-owls usually approach Suhaam from April to early May, before spoonbill chicks are present, they continued to approach until early July this year, apparently due to insufficient food in their usual habitat.

It is such a pity that predators have struck a nesting site again. Last year, the breeding of spoonbills also failed greatly at Namdong Reservoir, another representative breeding site. The cause there was raccoons. Namdong Reservoir has two artificial islands: a small one originally known as Spoonbill Island, and a larger one that was built later. The city of Incheon has installed iron and electric fences around the large island to prevent raccoons from approaching. Spoonbills made about 110 nests this year, but only on the small island. It is speculated that the fence to stop raccoons also affects the spoonbills somehow.

It seems difficult to solve the problem at Suhaam, for multiple reasons. The Eurasian Eagle-owl, although classified globally as a species of "Least Concern", is nationally endangered in South Korea like the spoonbill. Fences can keep out raccoons at Namdong Reservoir, but how on earth can we stop the flying birds? And since it is happening in the wild, we need to be careful about how much humans interfere.

I am worried that the breeding environment for spoonbills in South Korea, mainly around Ganghwa Island and Incheon, is becoming increasingly unreliable.

- BY HEA JIN PARK

(Adapted with permission from Team SPOON's electronic newsletter Weekly Spoonbill Times*, August 30, 2020.)*

EDITORIAL:

CAN THE COMFORT OF BIRDS DURING THE PANDEMIC CHANGE CITY FORM AND EXPAND HABITAT PROTECTION?

When people were ordered to shelter-in-place, millions turned to bird-watching for pleasure and emotional reassurance. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology noted that registration for eBird Yard Lists rose 900% and 150,000 people downloaded the Lab's app for bird identification. Most encouraging, there was an 80% increase in uploaded audio recordings of bird songs, indicating that people activated nuanced senses, requiring deeper attention. My grandson Atticus and I contributed to this increase in use of the Macaulay Library recordings of bird calls, matching sounds with visual sightings, and "seeing" some hard-to-sight birds by sound alone. We can now imitate the rain crow whose architectural tail we seldom see.

We have long known that experiencing nature is good for our health, and this dramatic increase in bird watching indirectly corroborates that. For SAVE this is more than good news in an otherwise depressing time. The Pandemic provides opportunities that never could have been conceived of without it. How much of the surge in bird-watching comes from new publics? Can this surge be sustained and turned into political action? Can it be directed to widespread support for habitat expansion near home and worldwide?

People stuck at home are paying more attention to common species. In the U.S. some states had three times as many reported sightings of suburban birds after the Pandemic hit. Many seem to be wishing, as one Japanese observer mused, for "places near my house where I could spend hours searching for birds." If such sentiment leads to policy changes, cities may be transformed to provide wildlands accessible from every neighborhood. Local ecotourism would then make staycations commonplace, opening new jobs and improving health.

With strategic opportunism we can export this the world over. Local awareness often leads to global empathy and actions, both at home and afar. SAVE must now plan how to turn the tragedy of COVID-19 into a vision that serves biological and cultural diversity through a combination of time-tested methods and new-found political support for bold action.

- BY RANDY HESTER

Cormorant
Image credit: Randy Hester

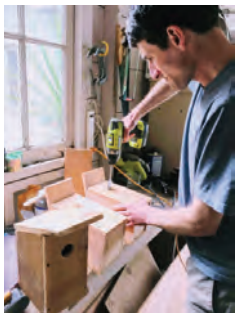
CELEBRATIONS AND REMEMBRANCES

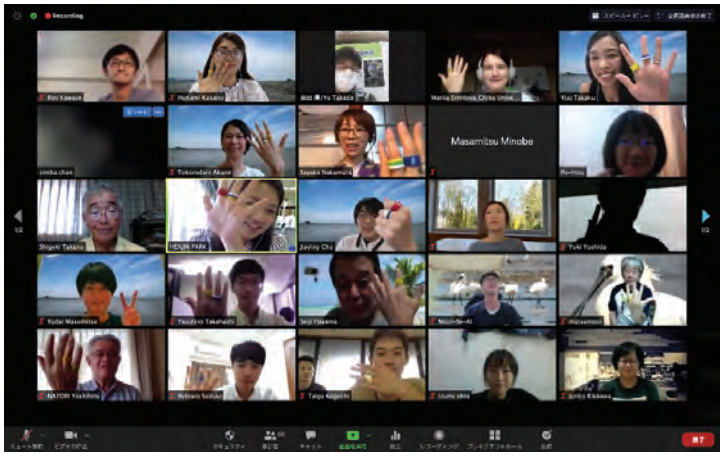
Since our last newsletter in 2019, SAVE Executive Committee members have been on the go. Yekang Ko received tenure at University of Oregon (see the article in this issue). Pin-Han Kuo started a new job as Assistant Professor at National Yilan University. Po-Hsiu Kuo bought a house. Adrienne Dodd started her Ph.D. at UC Berkeley, after marrying her sweetheart and director of the video "Conflict of Greens", Mabo Zeng. Longtime SAVE Executive Committee member / newsletter editor Fiona Cundy and Baker Lyon were married in Portland, Oregon, and backpacked in Idaho's Sawtooth Wilderness on their honeymoon. We are also excited to announce the arrival of a new SAVE family member in Portland: congratulations to Kelly Janes (former SAVE Executive Committee member) and Shane Hollon on the birth of Callum Escher in February 2020 and best wishes to your family!

Several of SAVE's friends around the world gave updates for this newsletter. "Grandma Spoonbill" Sheila Dickie (another former Executive Commitee member) is still an avid birder, sending greetings to all along with fond memories of SAVE's fall bake sales and migrations at UC Berkeley. Team SPOON held their 5th Anniversary Party on September 13, with 55 people joining online; they read *The Letter from Poo, the Black-faced Spoonbill*, in Japanese, English, Korean, and Chinese, and felt connected to one another beyond borders.

Sadly, on July 11, the Black-faced Spoonbill and SAVE International lost one of their biggest supporters, Professor Chao-ching Yu of Chung Yuan Christian University (CYCU) in Taiwan. Chao had a deep love of nature, which he infused in Big Tree Classroom, the groundbreaking program in Landscape Studies that he started in 2004. Randy Hester and Marcia McNally taught there with Chao every spring; SAVE Advisory Committee member Jeff Hou also taught and lectured there often over the years. In 2014, SAVE members Derek Schubert, Fiona Cundy, Tami Church, Jing Ma, and Shanna Atherton visited Taiwan to present their work at the conference of the Pacific Rim Community Design Network and ran with Chao in CYCU's student/faculty Olympic races. We miss Chao's spirit and love, and are grateful for his many contributions to SAVE International's work.

Chao with his wife, Emily SC Yang, and their dog DoDo
Photo credit: John Liu (undated photo)





SPOONBILL NEWS

Atticus Hester, grandson of SAVE co-founder Randy Hester, gives us this investigative report, straight from the spoonbill's beak.

(tear here)

STAYING CONNECTED THROUGH TRYING TIMES

Dear Friends of Spoonbills:

Democratic design and environmental planning are more important than ever, in a year with a global pandemic, rampant wildfires, and bad news around many corners. Although many of us are physically separated from our friends and families, we can stay connected through our shared love of the natural world around us and a vision of healthy habitats for spoonbills, other wildlife, and humans alike. As the spoonbill population continues to grow, we know that what we've done together has worked and we need to keep it up. We haven't been able to travel much in 2020, but we are still collaborating across time zones and continents like we've done for 23 years. We look forward to seeing old friends and making new ones in 2021.

Please make a donation to renew your membership in SAVE or to become a member for the first time. Thanks 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

Please make your check payable to SAVE/EII and mail it to SAVE International, c/o Earth Island Institute, 2150 Allston Way Suite 460, Berkeley, CA, 94704. You can also donate through the SAVE website: saveinternational.org/get-involved/donate/

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