

Spoonbills Speak

echoes across the Pacific



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BOTULISM KILLS SEVEN PERCENT OF WORLD SPOONBILL POPULATION



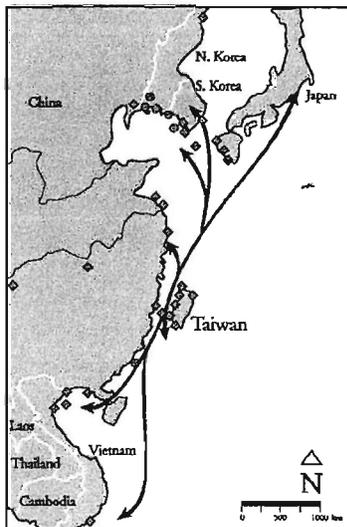
Black-faced Spoonbill (Platalea minor)

In December through February, an outbreak of botulism killed 73 black-faced spoonbills in Taiwan. About fifty birds died before experts could identify the disease. Local officials, along with scientists from Japan and around the world, scrambled to determine the cause of the outbreak, to keep healthy spoonbills away from the source of the disease, and

to save some ailing birds with antidote serum. Recent epidemics of botulism have killed birds by the thousands on Lake Erie, the Salton Sea, and even on San Francisco Bay, but the situation in Taiwan is more serious than the numbers might suggest: seventy-three black-faced spoonbills represent seven percent of the world's population.

At their wintering grounds on Chiku Lagoon and the estuary of the Tseng-wen River, the spoonbills have enjoyed rich habitat, enhanced by a dense array of shallow ponds that humans have built for fish-farming. The number of spoonbills counted in this area has gone up in the past few years, but scientists fear this may mean not that the population of spoonbills is increasing, but simply that the birds are running out of places to live.

Through development, humans are destroying spoonbill habitat along their flyway on the eastern coast of Asia. The birds migrate every year between summertime breeding grounds in the north and a wintertime home in the south. A few sites in Taiwan, China, and Vietnam have been designated as protected habitat, but most of the spoonbills flock to



Black-faced Spoonbill Flyway

places that lack governmental protection. In South Korea, the government is filling tidal mudflats where the spoonbills forage. In Macao, critical habitat is being replaced by a vacation resort. When habitat has been destroyed, the remaining birds must find another place to live, and if the birds are concentrated on only a few sites, they become especially vulnerable to catastrophic events like the recent wave of botulism. When not enough habitat remains, all of the birds die: end of species.

To deal with the current crisis, TESRI has recommended a three-day "International Symposium on Black-faced Spoonbill Conservation" to be held in late March or early April. Local and international experts will discuss (1) Rescue and release, (2) Pathology, disease control and population genetic studies, and (3) Habitat management and environmental detection and control.

SAVE'S FIVE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY EVENT

On August 26, 2002, SAVE International members from the past and present came together in Berkeley to discuss the success of our organization in its first five years and where



SAVE Supporters at the Anniversary Event

to go from here. Randy Hester, a co-founder and member of SAVE's Advisory Committee, evaluated SAVE's progress and presented a report card of grades earned in various "subjects." Although SAVE scored well in subjects such as "raising international awareness," "ecotourism", and "stopping the Binnan Industrial Complex", it showed no mercy on itself by scoring an F in "obtaining habitat preservation" and "gaining exposure in the U.S. media."

Following the report card presentation, Barbara Butler presented a work plan with three main goals for the next five years: 1) Implementing the sustainable alternative plan in Tainan County, Taiwan; 2) Developing the flyway network to ensure the long-term survival of the black-faced spoonbill; and 3) Ensuring the long-term viability of SAVE as an organization. UC Berkeley Professors Matt Kondolf and Tim Duane, and Earth Island Development Director Steve Zimmerman were on hand to comment on the future five-year plan and gave advice for future action.

SAVE UPDATE

UCB Researchers Evaluate Airport Impact

Although the Binnan Industrial Complex is dormant, new proposals have emerged for the Taiwan salt lands that empty into Chigu Lagoon. The most recent is an international airport. UC Berkeley graduate students under the direction of Professors Tim Duane and Randy Hester are busy researching the effects of this proposed airport. Work groups are tackling the many aspects of the likely impact, including noise, pollution, economic sustainability, effects on wildlife and growth inducement. The results will be presented to Magistrate Su and Tainan county officials in March.

Coastal Taiwan Ecotourism Workshop

In September, SAVE members Randy Hester and Barbara Butler traveled to Taiwan to deliver papers at an ecotourism workshop sponsored by Magistrate Su. The goals of the workshop were to 1) present international ecotourism case studies to provide guidance on balancing protection of the resource and tourism development and 2) work with local officials and community members to determine how ecotourism planning concepts could be applied to National Scenic Area and ecotourism planning in Coastal Taiwan County.

International Grassroots Forum

NGOs from Taiwan shared their experiences in fighting pressing environmental problems in August's World Sustainability Hearing, a parallel event to the UN summit in Johannesburg. The event was designed as a grassroots forum to discuss global governance issues and was aimed at holding the UN accountable. Tzu-Chen Chang, from TEPU Tainan, presented the threats and opportunities for Chiku's wetlands and how the anti-Binnan movement inspired the public in protecting wetlands and the Black-faced Spoonbill. Activists from Taiwan call for international mutual support and cooperation in facing the challenges of globalization. For more information, visit <http://www.earthisland.org/wosh>

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ACT GLOBALLY AND LOCALLY!

The recent spoonbill deaths may break our hearts or rally us to action, but if Americans want to encourage foreign countries to protect the environment, we run the risk of appearing as hypocrites. Wetlands are particularly beleaguered in the United States; while we tell the world to safeguard wetlands, we must at the same time put our home in order. Endangered species like the Florida panther and red-legged frog depend on wetlands that many people would prefer to drain, fill, or otherwise obliterate. Regulations allow developers to destroy old wetlands by building new wetlands, even though many constructed wetlands fail before they can provide the promised habitat value.

Further, the Bush administration is weakening the Clean Water Act by removing federal protections from many wetlands—as much as 20% of the nation's total, or about 8 million ha (20 million ac)—making states responsible for protecting wetlands, though they lack the money or expertise to do so. These attacks will continue until we show the administration how strongly we disapprove. We must build our ideological ground letter by letter, vote by vote, until our elected officials share the tenets that we are trying to spread abroad. An ocean away, the fragile black-faced spoonbills are depending on us.

LETTER FROM CHI-CHAO THE SPOONBILL



Hello friends,

It's been a rough start to the year...73 of my aunts, uncles and siblings died of food poisoning. Some of my friends are talking about flying somewhere safer next year, but we don't know where. I've always loved winters in Chiku and sure hope I can come back next year.

And then with the airport everything seems so shaky. Too bad humans can't fly, like us. They they wouldn't need to put that airport in our back yard. I know you all are doing the best you can, so please keep it up!

Love, Your Friend, Chi-chao