



# Spoonbills Speak

echoes across the Pacific

<http://savespoonbills.wordpress.com/>

## SAVE TAKES AIM AT THE FALSE "GREEN CITY" SONGDO

SAVE International has just launched an ambitious campaign to oppose the destruction of the Songdo Tidal Flats, on the west coast of South Korea. These tidal wetlands used to provide excellent habitat for spoonbills and huge flocks of other migrating birds, but recent construction projects have filled about 80% (10,000 acres) of the wetlands. These projects have the backing of the South Korean government and many high-powered American investors: chief developer Gale International; Cisco, 3M, Microsoft, and other corporations; and thirteen major universities that have agreed to open satellite campuses on the filled wetlands. The South Korean government and the developers are promoting this Songdo International Business District as a "sustainable city of the future". Destroying wetlands and harming endangered species, however, are not sustainable activities. This project would be illegal in the U.S.

As past issues of Spoonbills Speak have mentioned, SAVE has been studying the threats and opportunities for spoonbills at other sites in South Korea, but the problem at Songdo just became our chief focus. A recent documentary film showed eight spoonbills nesting on an artificial island, basically just a pile of rocks, in an industrial-sewage lagoon near Songdo. In another nearby pond, dead fish were washing ashore. If this island was the best place for the spoonbills to build their nests, we knew that the situation must have been dire.

Our new campaign includes letters to the universities and companies involved in the project, asking them to reconsider their support; requests for American magazines and other media to feature this story; an editorial by Randy Hester that he has submitted to the major newspapers near the thirteen universities. (The Durham Herald-Sun published Randy's Op-Ed piece in early January 2010: you can read it at <http://tinyurl.com/y17ldsv>) The center of our campaign is a hard-hitting press kit, which presents an overview of the black-faced spoonbill, a history of SAVE, our work to preserve habitat for the spoonbills, and other facts and projections specific to Songdo. A team of consultants, working closely with SAVE's Executive Committee, spent four months to research and prepare this press kit.

This is not the first time SAVE gathered allies against a

project that seemed unstoppable: we prevailed against the proposed Binnan Industrial Complex at Chiku Lagoon in Taiwan. Watch for updates on this campaign in future issues of our newsletter. --- BY DEREK SCHUBERT



*Promotional Rendering of Songdo International Business District*

## TAIWAN'S NEWEST NATIONAL PARK CELEBRATES THE SPOONBILL

Taiwan's central government recently announced the creation of its latest national park. The park carves out portions from the national scenic area where the largest numbers of spoonbills roost in the winter and where they can most easily be viewed by tourists in Tainan City and County. The designation of a national park, the gem of tourism, is a tribute to the rising importance of the black-faced spoonbill and ecotourism as an economic force in the area. Tourism has steadily risen in the area of the last decade and continues to produce jobs even as other financial markets have stalled. Most local leaders, even those who previously supported traditional polluting industries for economic reasons, now champion the spoonbill for economic reasons. It is, however, unclear whether the national park designation will offer any significant new protection for the spoonbills' most critical habitat. Some fear that it will diminish the authority of the national scenic area plan to expand spoonbill habitat. This happens the spoonbill may never have enough winter roosting and foraging sites to sustain a viable population.

--- BY RANDY HESTER



*Chigu, Tainan*



*Cheese, Peeps*

## WILL BUDAI SALT FLATS SET PRECEDENT FOR STEEPING STONE HABITAT?

At the end of November, SAVE co founder Randy Hester participated in NTU sponsored workshops to develop a master plan for habitat creation in the Budai Salt Flat. Budai is potentially one of the most important stepping stones to expand suitable spoonbill roosting and foraging areas, critical if the bird is to reach a sustainable worldwide population. Spoonbills have been occupying this site (especially the most isolated central area) for some time, even though it is not prime habitat. A preliminary analysis concludes that it could become one of the most important keys to spoonbill survival. Because of recent flooding the Taiwan government plans to use most of these salt lands for flood detention so a complex multi-use plan will have to be made. The local non-governmental groups are doing extraordinary cultural and ecological projects that reinforce spoonbill habitat creation, but it is unclear whether the central government will violate the approved master plan for the national scenic area and use the Budai wetland for other purposes. Stay tuned for updates.  
--- BY RANDY HESTER



*Budai salt flats, Tainan*

## PEEPS HIT SPOONBILL LAND

In the summer of 2009, the three “Peeps” (your newsletter editors Gina, Jessica, and Yu) joined other SAVE members and local people for their first visit to spoonbill land. The two-day trip included visits to Budai, Chigu and Sihcao. Even though our spoonbill friends were in Korea and would not be in Taiwan until winter, it was exciting for us to encounter the spoonbill habitats and physically experience the places from SAVE’s Taiwan stories. We were greeted by the warm welcome and love toward the birds from the locals, and were thrilled to see many tributes around the towns. The effects of pollution at the sites, though, were eye-opening and we noticed much damage to the environment. Later that night, SAVE members, the local bird enthusiasts, local government officials, and Cheng Kong University Professors exchanged their enthusiasm about the spoonbills over dinner: a lot of good ideas flew around the table, and it was great to see so many people talking together about how to help the birds. Lastly, the Peeps made sure to forage at the famous Tainan Night Market. We headed back to Berkeley with new insights for the challenges ahead. --- BY CHIA-CHIA OU (GINA), JESSICA LAI, YU SHIH



*Dinner with local experts and government officials.*

## 2009 SAVE TRIP TO SOUTH KOREA

In May 2009, five SAVE members – Randy Hester, Marcia McNally, Chris Alford, Yoonju Chang, and Ye Kang Ko – went to South Korea to continue our work on Black-Faced Spoonbill (BFS) preservation. The trip was a great opportunity for SAVE to meet many people and several major media reporters, convey our genuine interest and concerns for South Korea, review our current efforts, and plan for our future directions and strategies.

We first visited Ganghwa Island as a follow-up to our work in 2008, with PGA Wetland Ecology Institute and Ganghwa People's Network as our hosts. Chris presented the updated work from the Environmental Planning Studio LA205 to bird experts, environmentalists from local NGOs, photographers, TV nature documentarists, the mayor of Ganghwa County and other government officials. We also met local fishermen and farmers in Ganghwa to discuss their business and the potential for eco-tourism based on fishing and farming. During our time on Ganghwa we visited two sites of interest to BFS: "Kakshibawi", a small rock island where spoonbills breed; and the world's smallest Ramsar site, an organic rice paddy where spoonbills forage and an endangered water plant "Maehwamaruem" (*Ranunculus katusensis*) is preserved. This is the first civic natural heritage site in South Korea purchased by citizens with support of the National Trust of Korea. Although there are still many challenges, we could see that Ganghwa is paying more attention to eco-tourism, organic farming, and BFS. The County is in the process of changing its official bird to the BFS and the County office building had a big photo of a spoonbill hanging in the hall.

Hosted by Green Incheon and a KBS TV documentarist, we visited a tiny artificial island in Songdo, a recently found spoonbill habitat. The detention lake where the island is located seemed dead and toxic – the watershed which contains 5,000 factories drains into it. It was crushing to see the spoonbills and their babies in the middle of it. Two thousand birds – mostly migratory ducks including the Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*)—died there last year from botulism. Incheon City plans to fill the remaining tidal flat for an international campus – thirteen U.S. universities will participate. We thought this area needs urgent care and agreed to help Green Incheon with a letter-writing campaign and to prepare an alternative plan. An interview with Randy Hester conducted in Songdo was included in a KBS TV documentary in June. In addition to spoonbill-related works, the trip provided a valuable chance to get a big picture of the reality of South Korea's "green" growth plan including the proposed Four Rivers Project—a large-scale river channelization project replacing the Grand Korean Canal Project. Randy and Marcia participated in "River Restoration Project in Korea: Are We on the Right Track?: Concepts, Methods, and In-

ternational Experience", a conference organized by the Professors' Organization for Movement against Grand Korean Canal, held in the National Assembly Auditorium. As invited scholars, Randy and Marcia presented the American experience of river restoration, a paper that they prepared with Professor Matt Kondolf of UC-Berkeley. Since SAVE returned to the U.S., many, including International Rivers, have written letters of protest for the professors' group which is suing the Korean government along with over 400 other organizations and 10,000 citizens. --- BY MARCIA MCNALLY & YE KANG KO



SAVE at Ganghwa

## STORK REPORT



Three SAVE babies were born in 2009:

- Julian Baunsgard, born to Barbara (formerly Butler) and Hugh Baunsgard on February 22nd
- Atticus Hester, born to Nate and Saralynn Hester on September 12th
- Owen Martinez, born to Jan Eiesland and Dave Martinez on December 10th

Welcome to the world!

## SAVE INVESTIGATES EXPANDED FLYWAY OPPORTUNITIES

Since returning from our May 2009 Korea trip SAVE has pulled out all of the stops to trying to catch up on the environmental politics and habitat issues we learned about. In addition to focusing on Songdo and the issues of rapid tidal flat loss, SAVE now realizes that it has a new opportunity to collaborate with other institutions and organizations.

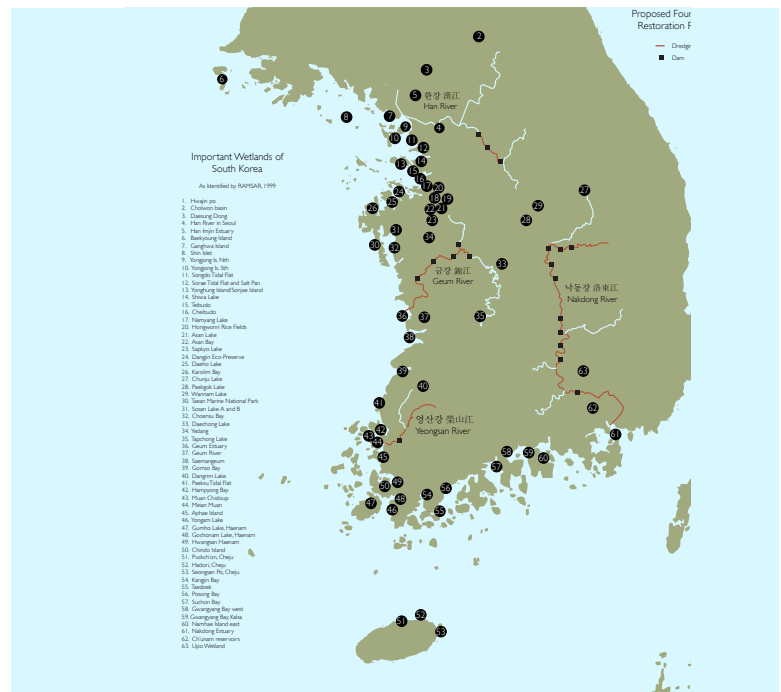
In researching the significance of the South Korean tidal flats, SAVE discovered that they are a critically important stopover habitat for birds migrating along the East Asian Australasian Flyway. Even though there are no Black-faced Spoonbills in North America, the partnership means that SAVE shares an interest with American agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wildlife refuge managers with species of concern that spend some part of the year in Alaska, and the Pacific Seabird Group. Further, there are multi-national organizations formed to focus on habitat issues in this region, such as the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership which is headquartered in Incheon City of all places. Hopefully these organizations will participate in convincing the South Korean government to stop filling wetlands, and increase the number of Ramsar-designated sites from 11 to the 63 nominated by local environmental organizations. --- HAYLEY DIAMOND

## KOREA'S TIDAL FLATS: WHAT IS GONE AND WHAT IS LEFT?

In the fall of 2009, SAVE researched tidal flat “reclamation” (that is, filling) in South Korea in order to understand the continuum of tidal flat development over time. Additionally, SAVE wanted to compare the timeline of

proposed tidal flat reclamation plans and South Korea’s environmental policy. SAVE used several sources, collaborating with Nial Moores of Birds Korea, to produce a figure that charts tidal flat reclamation over time. Although there is incomplete data on the historic area of tidal flats in South Korea and disagreement between researchers as to the exact area of remaining tidal flats, it is clear from the figure that there has been a decrease in tidal flats over time due to reclamation and that South Korea has continued to pursue development of tidal flats even after creating a wetland conservation policy. This discouraging fact has prompted SAVE to continue its media campaign to raise awareness on South Korea’s tidal flat reclamation and its negative impact on the Black-faced Spoonbill and other species.

--- HAYLEY DIAMOND



Important Wetlands of South Korea

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