



## **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

*Conservation Priorities  
for  
Migratory Shorebirds  
of the  
East Asian-Australasian Flyway*

**WWF-Hong Kong 2012**

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## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Every year, 50 million waterbirds from over 250 species migrate up and down the East Asian-Australasian (EAA) Flyway, which extends some 13,000 km from the Arctic Circle through southeast Asia, and south to New Zealand (**See Figure One**). The EAA Flyway spans 22 countries and is one of the world's nine major flyways.

The latest data and published reports all point to a regrettable reality: waterbirds along the EAA Flyway are in serious decline. Furthermore, a 2010 Wetlands International report on the global status of waterbirds draws attention to the fact that Oceania and Asia, which encompasses the EAA Flyway, are experiencing the most serious waterbird population declines. Asia ranks worst in the world in terms of these trends (**See Figure Two**).

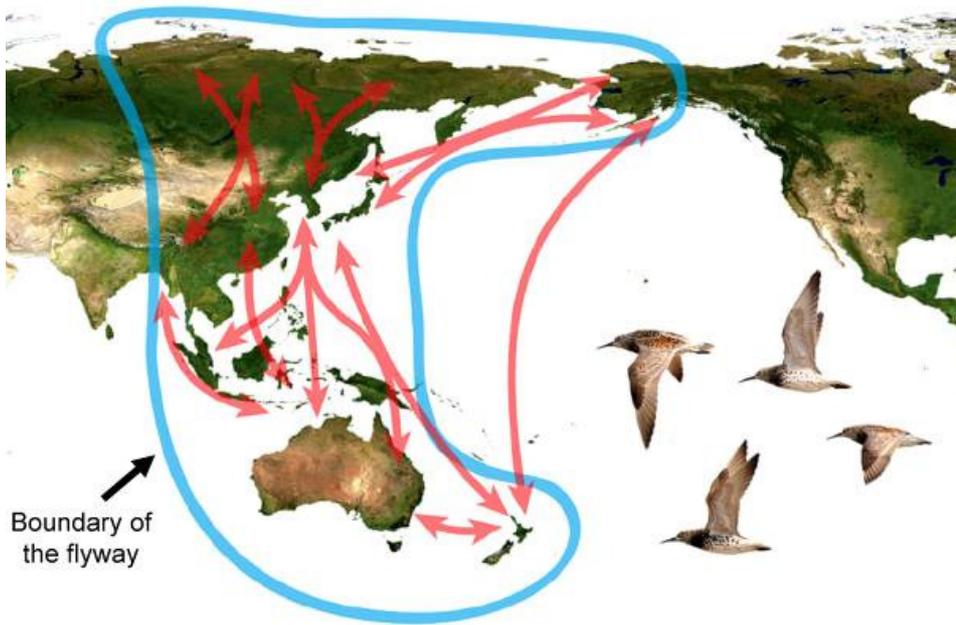
Of the 20 major waterbird families for which there is reliable long-term population data, migratory shorebird populations (which include seven waterbird families, 54 species and 68 potential populations) are rapidly declining, particularly arctic breeders which rely on key staging sites. Populations were already struggling in the 1980s, but through the 1990s the rate of decline was four times faster (Davidson 2011).

A situational analysis of the EAA Flyway migratory waterbirds performed by WWF-Hong Kong in 2009 identified a number of factors behind these declines: land claim or drainage, human disturbance, intensification of aquaculture practices and pollution were major threats; while the lack of conservation management at important sites, unsustainable harvesting of shared food, climate change, hunting and exotic invasive species were medium-high threats. These factors concur with other analyses (Davidson 2011, Mackinnon 2012).

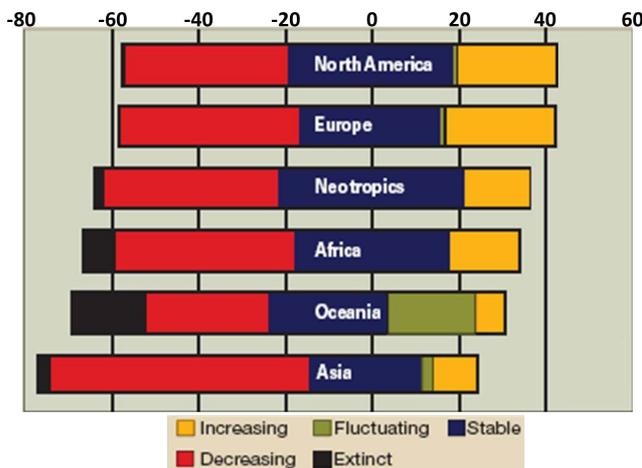
In Asia, the major determinant behind the current population falls was the degradation and loss of coastal mudflats. Over the past 50 years, losses of up to 51 percent of coastal wetlands have occurred in China, Japan has lost 40 percent of its wetlands, and the Republic of Korea has lost 60 percent, according to a recent IUCN publication (Mackinnon 2012).

The issues involved are complex and diverse, but one fundamental problem is that many governments do not fully recognize or acknowledge their own country's importance to the migration cycle of shorebirds along the EAA Flyway. Conservation policies often exist at the national level only, while decisions are made without due consideration being given to the cumulative impact on shorebirds from human activities along the flyway. Another underlying problem is the voluntary nature of international agreements relating to conservation, meaning that no action is taken and no pressure exerted across national boundaries. The result is that the actions of one country can undermine the conservation efforts of all other countries with few or no consequences.

**Figure 1. The East Asian-Australasian Flyway (Reproduced courtesy of the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, 2011)**



**Figure 2. Percentage of known waterbird populations in each Ramsar region showing each of five population trends (Wetlands International 2010).\***



\*The baseline has been set at the midpoint of the two neutral trend categories (stable and fluctuating). The position of each bar therefore reflects the proportion of populations in the region that is increasing, and the proportion that is decreasing/extinct.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project's main objective is to ensure a flyway-wide Conservation Plan is in place to guide governments, conservationists, environmental NGOs and researchers to implement priority actions to conserve migratory shorebirds in the EAA Flyway.

This Plan is the major component and output of this project. It will be created by a process involving a vigorous analysis of shorebird population data and critical sites, followed by a stakeholder workshop; and will be written by EAA Flyway shorebird specialists. The Plan will also provide recommendations and action points to

address the most pertinent and pressing issues for priority species and help guide the coordination of international conservation measures to protect those species.

As the first such plan to focus solely on the conservation needs of priority shorebird species on a flyway-wide scale, the Conservation Plan's success is highly reliant on the support and involvement of experienced strategists and technical specialists to compile it, and commitment from the target groups to implement its actions.

The latter stages of the project will involve encouraging the uptake of recommendations and actions stated in the Plan.

## TARGET GROUPS

- **National governments:** particularly Australia, Indonesia, the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Japan, Russia, and the USA. These countries are vitally important to migratory shorebirds across the EAA Flyway. The other 14 countries along the flyway are secondary target groups.
- **International NGOs:** particularly BirdLife International, Ramsar, Wetlands International, WWF (Australia, Indonesia, China, Japan and Russia offices).
- **National NGOs:** for example Birds Korea, the Australian Wader Studies Group, and the Wild Bird Society of Japan.
- Expert shorebird conservationists, academics and researchers in each of the 22 countries.

*Note: the above list is a preliminary indication of the likely target groups. A finalized list will be confirmed during the compilation of the Plan.*

## PROJECT CONTENT AND SCHEDULE

This project is divided into four phases:

- (I) Desktop-based Status Assessment Report;
- (II) Stakeholder Workshop;
- (III) Production of the Plan; and
- (IV) Promoting and Implementing the Plan.

### PHASE I – STATUS ASSESSMENT REPORT OF EAA FLYWAY SHOREBIRDS

#### *Part a)*

Determining the species of highest conservation importance in the EAA Flyway is a crucial first step. An assessment of all 54 species and 68 potential populations will be completed using the most up-to-date data. Through a prioritization process, the shorebird species in most need of conservation attention will be identified for inclusion in the Plan.

#### *Part b)*

An analysis of each priority species will be presented as individual status reports. The reports will include essential ecology (e.g. feeding and breeding), key threats,

major findings from recent research projects (e.g. satellite telemetry), and updated information on migration routes, important staging and non-breeding sites, among other parameters. The reports will also list key data that are not currently available, which need to be addressed in the Plan.

*Part c)*

An analysis of the most important sites for priority species and identification of critical areas or “hotspots” for conservation action.

## **PHASE II – STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP**

A workshop will be organized to bring together stakeholders, shorebird specialists and conservation strategists from across the EAA Flyway to agree on the details of the Plan; process to completion, structure, responsibilities of stakeholders, priority actions and timelines. The Status Assessment Report will be a key document in facilitating the workshop.

## **PHASE III – PRODUCTION OF THE PLAN**

Based on the recommendations gathered at the workshop, the Conservation Plan will be produced by mid-2013. Shorebird conservationists from different regions of the EAA Flyway will be involved in drafting and commenting on the Plan.

Topics will include:

- Identification of hotspot areas and critical sites.
- Identification of key information / data gaps.
- An assessment of the network of wetlands required (including number, size, location and quality) for priority shorebird species to successfully complete their annual migration; and thus maintain the integrity of their flyway.
- Priority conservation measures to undertake (identified at the government or ENGO level).
- High priority research studies to inform conservation action.

Actions will be identified down to the country level at a minimum, allowing for implementation by national governments and/or conservationists working in those countries. The Plan will also be translated into Russian, Korean and Chinese.

## **PHASE IV – PROMOTING AND IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN**

All going well, the Plan will be launched at the Seventh Meeting of Partners of the East Asian-Australasian Partnership, to be held in Alaska in June 2013.

Thereafter, the Plan will be promoted at various regional symposiums and workshops to encourage action on its recommendations and to reach peripheral target groups. Implementation of the actions recommended for national governments will be encouraged through regional initiatives like the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway or at various conventions.

To further promote the Plan, short news articles in different languages will be published in prestigious, high-impact regional publications and newsletters and posted on web-based forums. In addition, a short promotional film and promotional

leaflets will be prepared for events and meetings, and will be used by partners to “spread the word” about the Plan.

A shorebird funding category will be added to WWF-Hong Kong’s Asian Waterbird Conservation Fund to encourage uptake of the priority conservation, research and education projects identified in the Plan. This fund will enable two projects to be undertaken annually. Lastly, training sessions on shorebird conservation priorities will be given to wetland managers from critically-important shorebird sites in China as part of WWF-HK’s wetland management training programme.

## ANTICIPATED CONSERVATION IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

With a high degree of buy-in and strong commitment from all target groups, especially governments, the Plan could stabilize currently-declining populations of priority shorebird species, and allow current populations endemic to the flyway to be stabilized.

If all parties act with the necessary alacrity, priority actions could be implemented as early as 2013-14 which would, for example, help save several critical wetland sites for priority shorebird species under immediate threat. Addressing all key drivers will, however, inevitably take longer to impact positively upon these priority shorebirds.

Opportunities to synergize the Plan with other conservation/action plans may arise during the drafting of the Plan or following its publication. These potential catalysts could significantly bolster the overall conservation impact.

The Plan is intentionally focused on the contemporary conservation needs of priority shorebirds along the EAA Flyway. However, considering the fast pace of change in the flyway regions, new priorities could conceivably emerge. As such, the Plan may require regular updating.



## TIMELINE

This project will last for approximately 24 months. The timeline is as follows:

Task	2012			2013				2014
	Apr -Jun	Jul -Sept	Oct -Dec	Jan -Mar	Apr -Jun	Jul -Sept	Oct -Dec	Jan -Mar
Status assessment report on EAA Flyway shorebirds								
Stakeholder workshop								
Produce the Conservation Plan								
Launch the Conservation Plan								
Promote the Conservation Plan through appropriate channels and platforms								

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