

Project Update: October 2007

A collaborative expedition to the northern Chukotsky Peninsula (Belyaka Spit, northern Koliuchinskaya Gulf; 67° 6' N; 174° 44'W) was undertaken by Vertebrate Department of the Moscow State University and Wrangel Island State Natural Reserve. Three researchers worked on the monitoring of a local population of the endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. This is the second most numerous species breeding population. A base for population monitoring has been set up in the area as a result of research performed here during 1986-88 and 2002 when population size and productivity were estimated.

Since logistic on Chukotka is extremely complicated because of lack of roads and unpredictable weather, we started our expedition as early as possible and departed to Anadyr at 5th of May 2005. Finally, we reached the Belyaka Spit at 20th of May when the tundra was still covered by snow (see photo). So we had about 10 days before birds arrived to prepare our expedition camp, equipment etc.

This year we repeated spring counts of displaying Spoon-billed Sandpiper males in coastal habitats preferred by Spoon-billed Sandpipers for breeding. The counts were done in the same manner as it was done here previously in 1973-74, 1986-88 and 2002. It was found out that population continue to decrease in number.

Results of searching of previously banded birds showed that adult bird's annual survival rate in 2002-2005 was significantly lower than in mid 80's. It is still unclear about causes of the high mortality.

We continued color banding of birds and 13 adults and 25 chicks were banded. Breeding pairs at a control study plot were counted and kept under observation to the end of season. We found out that breeding success was extremely low and it was caused by high natural predation in 2005.

Unfortunately, our results indicate the critical situation in the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population at the northern Koliuchinskaya Gulf because of the low breeding success and continuation of population number declining. Nevertheless, we are encouraged that we got population monitoring data in 2005 and thus the impressive almost 30 years old monitoring at northern Koliuchinskaya Gulf have been prolonged for 3 more years.



Wild and remote areas such as Belyaka Spit could be reached by this kind of ATV in the spring time. 19th May 2005.



Expedition camp (a hut and a light house) at the Belyaka Spit. May 21st, 2005.



Banding. June, 2005



Spoon-billed Sandpiper breeding habitats at the coastal tundra. The Bowhead Whale Jaw on the front.