

**Monitoring and evaluation of programs designed to
reduce trapping of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in
Myanmar**



28 February, 2013

Myanmar Environmental Policy Students

(Open University, UK)

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Executive Summary

This monitoring and evaluation project (2013) focuses on the 2010 immediate Action plan, implemented by the Biodiversity and Nature Conservation Association (BANCA), which was designed to provide bird trappers with alternative livelihoods to the trapping of over wintering birds, which has been identified as the main cause of the decline in the population status of the Spoon billed Sandpiper (SBS) and other species in Myanmar.

The seven day monitoring and evaluation trip found that although the hunting and/or trapping of birds has largely disappeared in both target areas of the Martaban Gulf and the population of Spoon billed Sandpipers and other birds appears to be increasing, former hunters utilizing alternative livelihood are experiencing financial hardship. Even though their commitment to BANCA currently remains strong, there is a risk that they may return to hunting, in order to supplement their inadequate income. This report recommends that the alternative livelihood program be subject to further review and revision. It also suggests that the formation of small and separate local conservation groups would be a potentially more effective strategy for ensuring long term conservation of bird species.

Background

General Background

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is listed as critically endangered with an estimated population of about only (500) across the world. It is estimated that at least 220 Spoon-billed Sandpipers, about half of its global population, winter in Myanmar's Gulf of Martaban. According to several reports produced by BANCA, over wintering birds, including Spoon-billed Sandpipers, are threatened by bird hunters, who use a variety of methods to trap wading birds for their livelihood. Hence, trapping is considered to be one of the main causes of the rapid decline of the species.

According to surveys conducted in 2008 and 2011, the Spoon billed Sandpiper population has generally been declining each year; BANCA have worked with local communities to investigate the economic factors behind the trapping of wild birds and to pursue ways to provide alternative livelihoods (or job opportunities) for bird trappers with the aim of reducing the trapping pressure.

Between March-May of 2010, a BANCA team took emergency action in order to raise local awareness of the problem and the role of the villagers in protecting birds, 22 long-term bird hunters were identified and were provided with alternative means of income generation. In order to support this process, hunters were classified into three groups:

Class (A) professional hunters: These were provided with assets with a total value of USD 500.

Class (B) opportunist hunters: These were provided with assets with a total value of USD 100 (for hunters on the Eastern shore) and 200 USD (for hunters on the Western shore) respectively.

Class (C) occasional hunters: These were excluded from the project.

Specific background

A post project evaluation of the 2010 emergency action was conducted in January 2011 in order to assess:

- The impact on hunting behavior
- The livelihood status of those who had ceased hunting
- The awareness and attitudes of hunters and village leaders toward the spoon-billed sandpiper

The report - "Assessment and Evaluation of emergency Activities for spoon-billed Sandpiper in the Eastern and Western Banks of Martaban Gulf, 2011" found that ten months after the intervention, hunting of SBS and other shorebirds in the target villages had ceased in those households that were recipients of livelihood replacement materials such as fishing nets. Nine of the former hunters had increased their income and livelihood status, some significantly, while some others had remained stable at subsistence levels. Many of those interviewed expressed attitudes and behaviors that were supportive of conservation measures.

Aim and objectives

The present (2013) monitoring and evaluation project was conducted by graduates of the UK Open University with the aim of observing, evaluating and assessing the progress of the alternative livelihoods project on the population status of Spoon-billed Sandpiper two years after the commencement of the emergency action plan of 2010. The following project objectives were identified:

- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation of alternative livelihood programs, job opportunities and income generation amongst Sandpiper trappers in the Gulf of Martaban, Myanmar.
- ❖ Contribution to population status record for the year 2012.
- ❖ awareness raising and educational promotion
- ❖ the development of an advocacy tool for more effective protection of the Spoon-billed Sandpiper

Methods

Duration: January 21- January 27

Two trips were undertaken-- one to the Eastern and one to the Western shore of the Gulf of Martaban. The research team conducted interviews with former bird hunters who had received support from BANCA as well as village leaders. The team was guided by an experienced senior staff member from BANCA. The project team visited 5 Villages on the Eastern shore during a 3 day trip and 3 villages on the Western shore during a 4 day trip. The project team interviewed 11 hunters and 5 village leaders and observed habitats of over wintering birds around the villages.

BANCA's senior staff member, Ko Pyae Phyo Aung, played a pivotal role in introducing and explaining the work of the project team to local audiences and setting up interviews with former bird hunters and village leaders who participated willingly in the project's survey and openly and independently answered the interview questionnaire. Interviews were recorded on digital recorders and in written form. The trip was documented using still photography.

The Project team

BANCA's senior staff member: Ko Pyae Phyo Aung Team
 members from the Open University Environmental policy course: Linn
 Naing, Kyaw Lu Tun, Khin Zaw Lin, Saw John Bright, Khin Thuzar Tint, Lamin Momo, Yi Yi
 Myint and Mi Hla Aye.

Findings / evaluation

- ❖ Alternative livelihoods were found to be increasingly less effective as a form of sustainable income generation among bird hunters.
- ❖ The population of spoon-billed Sandpipers and other wintering birds appears to be increasing.
- ❖ Trapping and hunting of wild birds has been abandoned by local people and former hunters have ceased bird trapping despite financial hardship.

- ❖ Although many local people and hunters know that Spoon-billed Sand pipers are in danger of extinction and the act of trapping birds is against the law, they do not appear to have developed a critical awareness and appreciation of the importance of conservation measures.
- ❖ Local audiences reported the need for more long-term programs geared toward sustainable income generation. They identified the need to set up local conservation teams/groups and more regular visits and guidance from BANCA and other organizations.

Discussion

According to the 2010 immediate action plan, BANCA were able to support hunters in replacing their former livelihood (bird trapping) with alternative livelihoods.

Class (A) hunters were provided with 500 USD worth of assets for either fishing or livestock farming (duck).

Class (B) hunters were provided with 100 USD (200 USD on the western shore) worth of assets. Some hunters chose to use these assets to take up fishing whereas others chose to engage in livestock farming (duck).

The majority of former hunters appear to be struggling hard to make a living using the alternative assets provided by BANCA. Fishing has become increasingly more difficult on account of the growing influence of large-scale corporate operations. Former hunters also lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out livestock farming successfully. Their current income generating capacity is significantly lower than in the past when they were relying on the trapping and selling of wild birds. These are clearly threats to the sustainability of the alternative livelihoods program. The seriousness of their struggle was made patently clear to the project team when they observed bird ringing materials, used to tag and track migratory movements, being traded in exchange for currency in one local village. Interestingly, the descriptions on these rings were in Thai.

“We earned more money from bird trapping than from fishing. Earning from bird trapping easily make a living but earning from fishing only just to get by...” “There is no longer selling/buying bird for meat in villages”

**Hunter - U Kyi Lin (Class A) (Age: 54)
Shwe Pyi Thit**

**Village -
Current livelihood - fishing**

A significant disincentive to continue trapping of wild birds is the fear of punishment. The 1994 wildlife Act outlaws the practice and states that the capture of wild birds is punishable by as much as seven years in prison. Indeed, this may be the most effective deterrent, according to interviews with former hunters and village leaders. In addition, most people believe that catching birds is a sinful deed that brings bad luck.

The abandonment of bird trapping has resulted in a steady increase in the population of resident and over wintering birds, including the Spoon billed sandpiper. No evidence of trapping activity was identified during the trip.

“Alternative livelihood as livestock farming (duck and pig) all failed ” “Now there are increasing number of birds so much that they are shoving over each other”

Hunter - U Ohn Tin (Age 68)

Village - Pho Ba village Tract, Shwe Nyaung Pin village

Current

livelihood - nothing (Following snake-bite while working as a farm laborer)

Awareness of the importance of conservation and the role of environment is very weak amongst the local population. This is due to a lack of basic education, poor knowledge and having next to no exposure/interest in the current wealth of news and media.

What most local audiences, including both hunters and village leaders, are hoping is that BANCA or other environmental organization will pay more attention to the difficulties they are experiencing and will make more regular visits. Moreover, they have expressed a desire to form small and separate conservation groups under the auspices of BANCA or other similar organizations, in order to become more active and effective participants in conservation activities.

“I have to monitor their action in compliance with conservation measures set by BANCA. It is better to have local conservation group in villages as group we already have for Red Cross”

Village leader - Aye Naing (Age 43)

Village -

Kyone Khite

Recommendations

More long-term and sustained livelihood programs are needed. Cash assistance alone does not seem to be enough for former bird hunters to survive in the long-term and there is a danger that they may revert to trapping. It is advisable to identify further technical or consultative assistance that could be given to them through discussions with local elders and professionals.

Greater technical and financial assistance needs to be made available in order to collect more detailed and accurate data on changes in bird populations, including the Spoon - billed Sandpiper, taking into consideration factors such as habitat loss and availability of food supply.

Regular programs and activities such as educative programs/ tours, along with entertainment or gift giving (edutainment), to local audience represent another means to attract positive local attention towards the conservation of resident and over wintering birds.

Forming small and separate local conservation groups in villages in the area would represent a participative approach to conservation. Awareness and knowledge of conservation could be improved and become more widespread and income opportunities for local people through conservation of wintering birds could be created. *Sustainable solutions demand that local people feel that conservation of birds is more beneficial to them than hunting.*

Pro-poor ecotourism could be a solution to the community sustainable development. Capacity building that focuses upon indigenous natural resource management is also advisable.

Annex (1)

Interview basic questionnaire

1. What are the benefits and drawbacks received from alternative livelihoods?
2. What are the main reasons for changing to alternative livelihoods?
3. What are the differences between the income of previous livelihood and present livelihood? Which can earn more?
4. What challenges or difficulties have you encountered in the new livelihood?
5. How and how often does BANCA give training and educative programs? How many audiences are there?
6. Do you think those training and educative programs are effective? What are the benefits of these?
7. How important is it to maintain the Spoon-billed Sandpipers?
8. How have you contributed to saving migrating birds?
9. What do you think are effective way of conserving the bird species locally?
10. What do you want to say or request to us?
11. What did BANCA give or offer in exchange for stopping bird trappings?
12. Do you think the numbers of birds are increasing or not after BANCA's immediate action plan?

Annex(2)

Documentary photos



U Ohn Tin and family



U Thein Myint and family



U Myint Aung

U Aye Ko

