



The International Black-faced Spoonbill Census: 21-23 January 2005

Y. T. Yu

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The Hong Kong Bird
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Cover photo and photo below: Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* at Mai Po, Hong Kong
(Photo by: Owen Chiang (www.i-owen.com))



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The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society Ltd.

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The International Black-faced Spoonbill Census, 21-23 January 2005

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Abstract

The International Black-faced Spoonbill Census was conducted during the period of 21-23 January 2005. A total of 1,475 globally endangered Black-faced Spoonbills were counted during the census. This figure has shown a minimum of 22% increase from the figure of 1,206 individuals in the 2004 census. Taiwan and Hong Kong are still two largest wintering places for this species and hold a total of 72% of the known wintering population. The increasing trend of the wintering population indicates that this bird species is recovering from the previous known low numbers.

Introduction

Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* only inhabits to coastal areas on the east fringe of Asia (Hancock *et al.* 1992, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992, Yu and Swennen 2004). Its world known population is as small as only a few hundreds in 1990s (Kennerley 1990, Dahmer and Felley 2000). Therefore, it was listed as globally endangered species (Collar *et al.* 1994, Baillie and Groombridge 1996, BirdLife International 2000) and then more attention was paid to the conservation of this species. Its population rose to over 1,000 individuals in January 2003 (Yu 2003) and even higher to over 1,200 birds in 2004 (Yu 2004). However, large proportion of this population concentrates in only a few places during winter, thus increase the chance that susceptible to some threats such as habitat degradation and destruction, and avian disease.

The wintering population of the Black-faced Spoonbills has been assessed by this international census annually since 1993. This census was also listed as high priority recommendation by Severinghaus *et al.* (1995). This census proved to be an effective and practical means to provide annual and comparable information on the population and distribution of wintering Black-faced Spoonbills. The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, an affiliate of BirdLife International started coordinated the international census from 2003 onwards.

Method

The census period was 21, 22 and 23 January 2005. Census dates have always been chosen in mid or late January because the spoonbills seem to be stable in mid-winter. Map 1 shows the area covered by the census and also sites with wintering spoonbills in this winter. Surveys were carried out in areas where Black-faced Spoonbills had been reported before and habitats are suitable to the spoonbills. Guidelines were sent to surveyors before the census as technical basis. Field counts were done in a synchronized manner, making use of binoculars and telescopes. Some other counts in the mid-winter period are also presented in this report.

Counting of the spoonbills relies on voluntary efforts from counters including experienced bird watchers, researchers and ornithologists. The census results in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan are summarized by coordinators in the respective regions. The counts in South Korea, China mainland including Hainan Island, the Philippines and Thailand were carried out by individuals sending in separate reports.

Some sites in close proximity, such as Mai Po in Hong Kong, Futian in Shenzhen and Taipa in Macao, all are in the Pearl River Estuary in southern China. Spoonbills can fly between these sites within a day. Hence, counts in these sites were conducted in synchronization.

Results and discussion

Overview

A total of 1,475 Black-faced Spoonbills were counted during the census period that is the new high number of the species (Table 1). It also has a 22% increase from the number of 2004 census and such increase is also the highest in comparison of two previous censuses (2004: 13%, 2003: 9.3%). This increasing trend has been continued since the commencement of this annual census, except slightly drops in winter 1996-97 and 1998-99 (Figure 1).

The actual number of the Black-faced Spoonbills could be higher than this figure. It is because an additional 79 individuals were reported in other sites not in the census period and hence the possibility of birds moving between sites could not completely be ruled out. The increase of the number mainly is contributed by more spoonbills present in the largest congregation places: Tainan area, Taiwan and Deep Bay, Hong Kong, as well as in China mainland. An increase of 125 and 73 birds were

made in Taiwan and Hong Kong respectively. The number recorded in China mainland has doubled from 91 birds in previous census to a total of 187 birds in this census. This is resulted by discovering two new important winter sites in Fujian and Guangdong. Details are referred to Table 1.

All participants surveyed in total of 61 sites during the winter 2004-05 (Table 1 and 2), of which the spoonbills were found in 40 sites. This is also the highest coverage of this census so far (winter 2003-04: 54 sites, winter 2002-03: 25 sites, winter 2001-02: 27 sites). More discussions of the numbers and trends of wintering Black-faced Spoonbills in different places are made below.

Taiwan

A total of 757 individuals (51% of the known world population, Figure 2) were recorded in Taiwan during this census. This is also a new high number in this area, indicated an increased of 20% from the figure of 632 birds in previous census (Table 3, Figure 3). The Chiku-Tsengwen Estuary area, including Sitsao, still holds the largest wintering population of this species in the world where 684 birds were counted. Another large flock of 57 birds were recorded at Pa-chang Estuary, Tainan, together with other 11 birds at Ilan, four at Yunlin and one at Taitung.

Pearl River Estuary (including Deep Bay in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, Taipa in Macao)

Counting of spoonbills was conducted in a synchronous manner. A total number of 350 Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded in this area during the census, of which 311 birds (21% of the known world population) were recorded in Deep Bay and the other 39 birds (2.6% of the known world population) were counted in Macao (Table 4, Figure 2). This is the new high number recorded in this area and it shows an increase in 20% from the last year figure (i.e. 293 birds, Figure 3).

In Deep Bay, birds were mobile between Mai Po Inner Deep Bay area and Futian during the census days. Their numbers showed a considerable fluctuation (Appendix 1). The highest number obtained in Hong Kong and Shenzhen was 288 and 48 respectively, however, these did not appear on the same time. Survey area in both Hong Kong and Shenzhen sides has good coverage, this includes the Mai Po Inner Deep Bay Ramsar Site, fishponds at Lok Ma Chau to the intertidal area at Pak Nai, and also most of the areas in the Futian National Nature Reserve. This new high number is closed to an earlier maximum count of 324 birds at Mai Po in November 2004 (W.H. Lee of AFCD *in litt.*), indicating that this synchronous count is an effective method of counting the wintering spoonbills in this area.

In contrast, 39 Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded at Taipa, Macao. Although the numbers were apparently more stable over the whole census period, it is in fact the first sign of decline in the increasing trend of past five years. It may indicate that habitat destruction and degradation from reclamations brought adverse impact to the wintering spoonbills in this site. More concern should be made on this important site for this species.

China Mainland and Hainan Island

Encouraging result was obtained from the Black-faced Spoonbill's population in China mainland. A new high number of total 187 birds were counted (Table 5) and two important wintering sites at Fuqing, Fujian province and Haifeng, Guangdong province were identified, where 52 (3.5% of the known world population) and 39 (2.6% of the known world population) birds were recorded in these two places respectively during the census. The largest wintering flock of the spoonbill was still recorded in Hainan Island at the same site (i.e. Segang in Dongfang), where a total of 68 birds were counted. Besides, small numbers were also present at Chongming Dongtan in Shanghai, Xiapu in Fujian and Lingao in Hainan.

Unfortunately, Yenchang in Jiangsu province, a well-known regular wintering site of this species, could not be covered during the census period. According to other reports of observation, a total of 21 birds were seen regularly in this winter. We believed the actual total number in China mainland could be even higher than the present figure. In addition to this, some areas are still largely under-surveyed, e.g. Zhejiang province where only one site at Wenzhou Bay was surveyed in this census. There has been record of spoonbills in this place during a satellite tracking study in 1999 (Ueta *et al.* 2002). Guangxi province where no survey was conducted in this census, but there has been record of seven birds at Hepu in 2004 census (Yu 2004).

Red River Delta, Vietnam

Same as previous years, Xuan Thuy National Park holds the largest number of the spoonbills in this area and a total of 56 birds were recorded (Table 1, 2 and 6). In this census, the tide was high to favour the count of the spoonbills but this high number was still slightly lower than the peak number of 61 birds recorded in previous winter. No apparent increasing trend of the wintering spoonbill is noted in this site, while numbers in Tainan and Hong Kong has shown increased considerably (Figure 3). It reflects that habitat degradation suggested by Yu and Swennen (2001) made the general condition of the national park less favourable for the spoonbills. The increase of wintering spoonbills at Hainan might relate to the decrease of numbers in Xuan Thuy as well. Some birds may change from wintering at the Red River Delta to Hainan Island.

Japan

A total of 103 Black-faced Spoonbills were counted from western Japan and Nansei-shoto Islands during the census period and additional 47 birds were recorded outside the census period. The total number of these birds is very similar to the figure of 149 birds in the 2004 census (Table 7), indicating that the wintering population is relatively stable in recent two winters.

Republic of Korea

Twenty-one Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded in Jeju Island in this census. This number falls again in the range of 14 to 29 birds since 1990s (Table 8) and the number of wintering Black-faced Spoonbills in this site is rather stable. This is the northern boundary of the known wintering range of this species.

Thailand

Only one bird was seen during the census period and another bird was also seen later on 25 January in the Gulf of Thailand. These sightings together with those in previous winters indicate that small number of the Black-faced Spoonbills may visit the Gulf of Thailand in winter in regular basis.

The Philippines

No bird was seen in the census period in the Philippines. However, one of three birds found at Palawan Island in previous winter still remained there over the summer and also intermittently appeared till 25 January 2005. Unfortunately, the fishpond where the spoonbills were usually seen had been drained out by local government on 4 February 2005 (Wild Bird Club, the Philippines *in litt.*). In addition, a single bird was also seen at Batanes Islands on December 2004 and the previous record in the island was three birds in 2001. It used to be very few Black-faced Spoonbills recorded in the Philippines, the present records would be related to the blooming of the population in recent years.

Conclusion

It is amazing that the number of the Black-faced Spoonbill could go over 1,400 individuals just after passing the boundary of 1,200 birds in last year. The increasing rate could even reach to 20% and this trend is encouraging for safeguarding this globally endangered species. Although two new important wintering sites are found along the coast of China mainland and one in Hainan Island found last year, more birds are still present at the traditional sites in Taiwan and Hong Kong that constitutes a total of 72% of the known global population. It reflects that the species

is still facing considerable threats from habitat degradation and destruction, and any bird disease. Besides, the breeding ground of this species is still not addressed in detail that is essential for saving this species from the brink of extinction in future.

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Map

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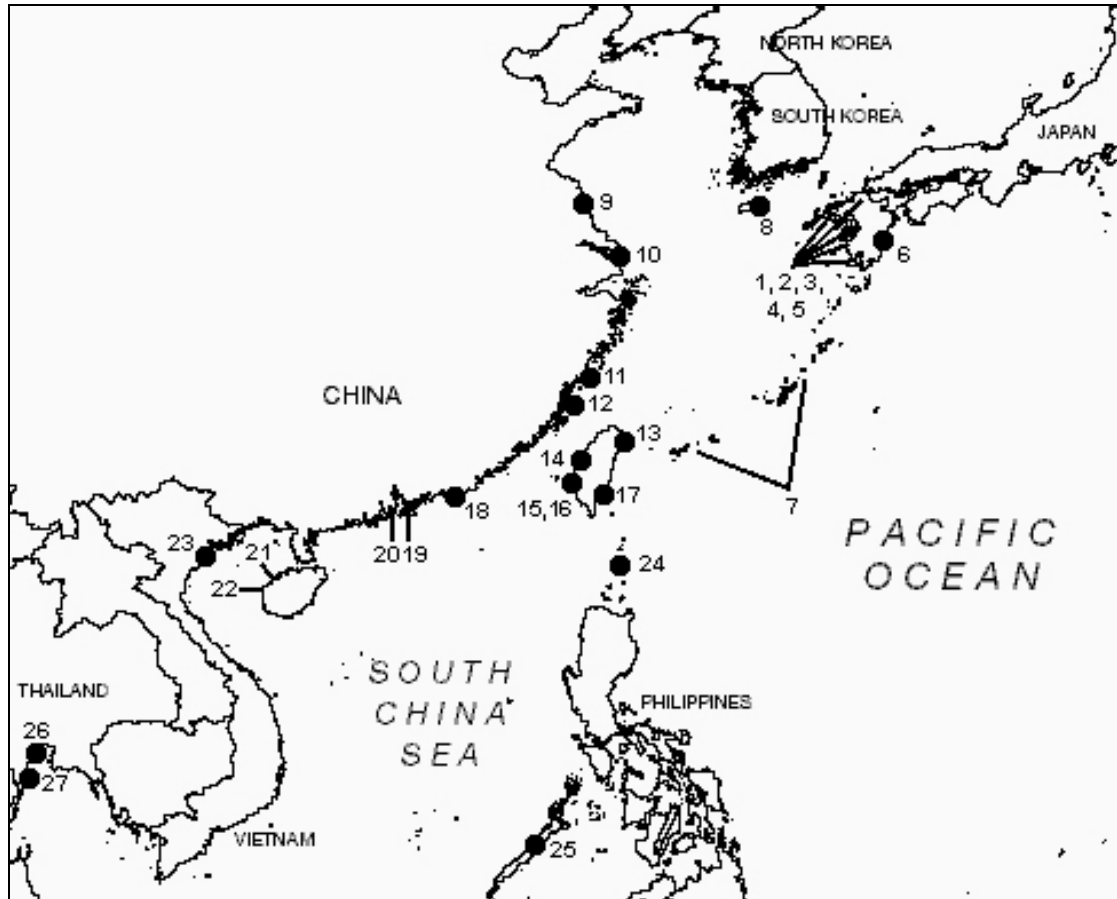


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Map 1. Locations of wintering Black-faced Spoonbills, winter 2004-05. 1) Fukuoka, Japan; 2) Saga, Japan; 3) Nagasaki, Japan; 4) Kumamoto, Japan; 5) Kagoshima, Japan; 6) Miyazaki, Japan; 7) Nansei-shoto Islands, Japan; 8) Jeju Island, Republic of Korea; 9) Yenchang, Jiangsu; 10) Chongming Dongtian, Shanghai; 11) Xiapu, Fujian; 12) Fuqing, Fujian; 13) Ilan, Taiwan; 14) Yunlin, Taiwan; 15) Chi-ku, Taiwan; 16) Szu-tso, Taiwan; 17) Taitung, Taiwan; 18) Haifeng, Guangdong, 19) Deep Bay, Hong Kong and Shenzhen, 20) Taipa, Macao; 21) Lingao, Hainan; 22) Dongfang, Hainan; 23) Xuan Thuy, Red River Delta, Vietnam; 24) Batanes Islands, the Philippines; 25) Palawan Island, the Philippines; 26) Sumutsakorn, Thailand; 27) Lam Pak Bea, Thailand.

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Table 1. Number of Black-faced Spoonbills in different locations of East Asia, winter 2004-2005. Numbers in parenthesis are extra birds counted outside the census period.

Region	Location	Date	Number	Reported by
China mainland	Yenchang, Jiangsu	Jan-Feb	(21)	Wang Hui
China mainland	Chongming Dongtan, Shanghai	21,22 Jan	8	Wang Jiyi, Zhang Kejia
China mainland	Fujian, Fujian	21-23 Jan	52 (8)	Fujian Bird Watching Society
China mainland	Xiapu, Fujian	21-23 Jan	11	Fujian Bird Watching Society
China mainland	Haifeng, Guangdong	21-23 Jan	39	Zeng Xianwu
China mainland	Houshui Bay, Lingao, Hainan	21-23 Jan	9	Zhang Guogang, Lee Kwok Shing, Liang Wei and Su Wenba
China mainland	Segeng, Dongfang, Hainan	21-23 Jan	68	Zhang Guogang, Lee Kwok Shing, Liang Wei and Su Wenba
Hong Kong	Mai Po and Deep Bay, including Futian, Shenzhen	21-23 Jan	311	Asia Ecological Consultants, Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department, Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and Shenzhen Bird Watching Society
Macao	Taipa	21-23 Jan	39	Leung Va, Silvia Choi
Taiwan	Chiku, Tainan	23 Jan	407	Black-faced Spoonbill Conservation Association, Wild Bird Society of Tainan County and Wild Bird Society of Happy Family
Taiwan	Sitsao, Tainan	23 Jan	277	Wild Bird Society of Tainan
Taiwan	Pa-chang Estuary, Tainan	23 Jan	57	Black-faced Spoonbill Conservation Association
Taiwan	Zhuo-shui Estuary, Yunlin	23 Jan	4	Zhan Zong-da
Taiwan	Zhi-ben, Taitung	23 Jan	1	Wang Ke-hsiao, Li Fu-mei
Taiwan	Weng-di, Ilan	21,22 Jan	11	Pai Shih-yang, Ho Rui-yang, Lin Zhe-an
Vietnam	Red River Delta, Xuan Thuy National Park	23 Jan	56	Nguyen Duc Tu
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Imazu-Higata (tidal flat)	23 Jan	25	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network

Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Artificial Island reclamation at Wajiro, Fukuoka City	23 Jan	7	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Wajiro tidal flat	23 Jan	5	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Tataru River estuary	23 Jan	6	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Sone tidal flat	23 Jan	1	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Saga Pref., Hayatsue River estuary	22 Jan	9	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Nagasaki Pref., inside the embankment of Isahaya Bay	21 Jan	4	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Kumamoto New Port	16 Jan	(25)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Midori River estuary	16 Jan	(6)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., estuaries of Ohno River & Suna River	16 Jan	(5)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Hi-kawa River estuary	16 Jan	(1)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Kagami River estuary	16 Jan	(7)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Miyazaki Pref., Hitotsuse River estuary	23 Jan	4	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kagoshima Pref., Beppu River estuary	23 Jan	12	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kagoshima Pref., Manose River estuary	23 Jan	15	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kagoshima Pref., reclaimed land of Izumi	23 Jan	1	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Nansei-shoto Islands: Okinawa Pref., Tomigusuku, Yone-Shankaku-ike Pond	21,22 Jan	14	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Nansei-shoto Islands: Okinawa Pref., Awase River estuary	24 Jan	(1)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Nansei-shoto Islands: Okinawa Pref., Ishigaki Island	Dec 2004 - Feb 2005	(2)	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Republic of Korea	Seongsanpo and Hado-ri fishponds, Jeju	21-23 Jan	21	Kang Chang-wan, Kim Eun-mi via Choi Chang-yong
The Philippines	Palawan Island	25 Jan	(1)	Mike Lu and Wild Bird Club, the Philippines
The Philippines	Sitio Chatapuyan, Ivana, Batanes	23 Dec	(1)	Byron D. Peralta
Thailand	Mangrove Research Centre, Sumutsakorn	22,23 Jan	1	Uaiphorn Khwanphae
Thailand	Lam Pak Bea	25 Jan	(1)	Chirdphong Termtanan
Total			1475 (79)	

Table 2. Site visited but no Black-faced Spoonbills seen during or near the census period.

Region	Location	Date	Reported by
China mainland	Wenzhou Bay, Zhejiang	21 Jan	Chen Shuihua
China mainland	Xiamen, Fujian	21-23 Jan	Xiamen Bird Watching Society
China mainland	Longhai, Fujian	21-23 Jan	Xiamen Bird Watching Society
China mainland	Yunxiao, Fujian	21-23 Jan	Xiamen Bird Watching Society
China mainland	Putian, Fujian	21-23 Jan	Xiamen Bird Watching Society
China mainland	Panyu, Guangzhou, Guangdong	23 Jan	Yu Haiyan, Dong Yuping and Huang Xinyi
China mainland	Shantou to Raoping, Guangdong	22 Jan	Zhang Kanghua
China mainland	Leizhou Peninsular, Zhanjiang Guangdong	21-23 Jan	Tom Dahmer
China mainland	Dongzhaigong Nature Reserve, Hainan	21 Jan	Samson So and Chen Wei
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Tsuyazaki Irie	23 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Izumi River estuary	23 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Fukuoka Pref., Chikugo River estuary	23 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Saga Pref., Daijugarami	23 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Saga Pref., Rokkaku River estuary	23 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Kikuchi River estuary	16 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Shira-kawa River estuary	16 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Mae River estuary	16 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Japan	Kyushu: Kumamoto Pref., Kuma River estuary	16 Jan	MJ Ueta and Japan BFS Network
Vietnam	Red River Delta, Thai Binh Estuary	22, 23 Jan	Stephan Doppage and Ha Quy Quynh (via Nguyen Duc Tu)
Vietnam	Red River Delta, Tien Lang District, Hai Phong Province	22 Jan	Stephan Doppage and Ha Quy Quynh (via Nguyen Duc Tu)
Vietnam	Ha Nam Island, Yen Hung District, Quang Ninh Province	21 Jan	Vu Thi Minh Phuong (via Nguyen Duc Tu)

Table 3. Numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in Taiwan during the international censuses.

Year	89-90	93-94	94-95	95-96	Jan 97	Jan 98	Jan 99
Total	150	206	286	300	298	363	380

Year	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
Total	380	427	582	580*	632	757

* This number also included 18 injured and sick individuals from the outbreak of avian botulism.

Table 4. Numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in the Pearl River Estuary during the international censuses.

Year	89-90	93-94	94-95	95-96	Jan 97	Jan 98	Jan 99
Mai Po	50	70	78	99	69	88	96
Futian	nc	nc	nc	nc	32	58	nc
Taipa	6	12	8	10	13	9	12
Total	56	82	86	109	114	155	108

Year	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
Mai Po	90	135	136	179	238	272
Futian	nc	42*	3	24	5	39
Taipa	6	36	37	46	50	39
Total	96	171*	176	249	293	350

nc = no count, *Forty-two birds in Futian was not included in the total number because counts in Mai Po and Futian were not taken simultaneously.

Table 5. Numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in China Mainland (exclude Futian, Shenzhen) and Hainan Island during the international censuses.

Year	89-90	93-94	94-95	95-96	Jan 97	Jan 98	Jan 99
Total	15	22	21	21	58	5	3

Year	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
Total	9	72	24	17	91	187

Table 6. Numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in Red River Delta, Vietnam during the international censuses.

Year	89-90	93-94	94-95	95-96	Jan 97	Jan 98	Jan 99
Total	62	25	23	75	nc	59	34*

Year	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
Total	46*	47	54*	65*	15	56

nc = no count, * Surveys also included Thai Binh and other places in the Delta.

Table 7. Numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in Japan during the international censuses.

Year	89-90	93-94	94-95	95-96	Jan 97	Jan 98	Jan 99
Total	5	16	14	31	28	75	60

Year	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
Total	99	87	107	128	149	103 (47)

Number in parenthesis is the birds recorded outside but closed the census period.

Table 8. Numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in Jeju Island, Republic of Korea during the international censuses.

Year	89-90	93-94	94-95	95-96	Jan 97	Jan 98	Jan 99
Total	6	nc	nc	15	16	25	14

Year	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
Total	20	21	29	22	23	21

nc = no count

International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 21 – 23 January 2005

Figures

Organized by:



The Hong Kong Bird
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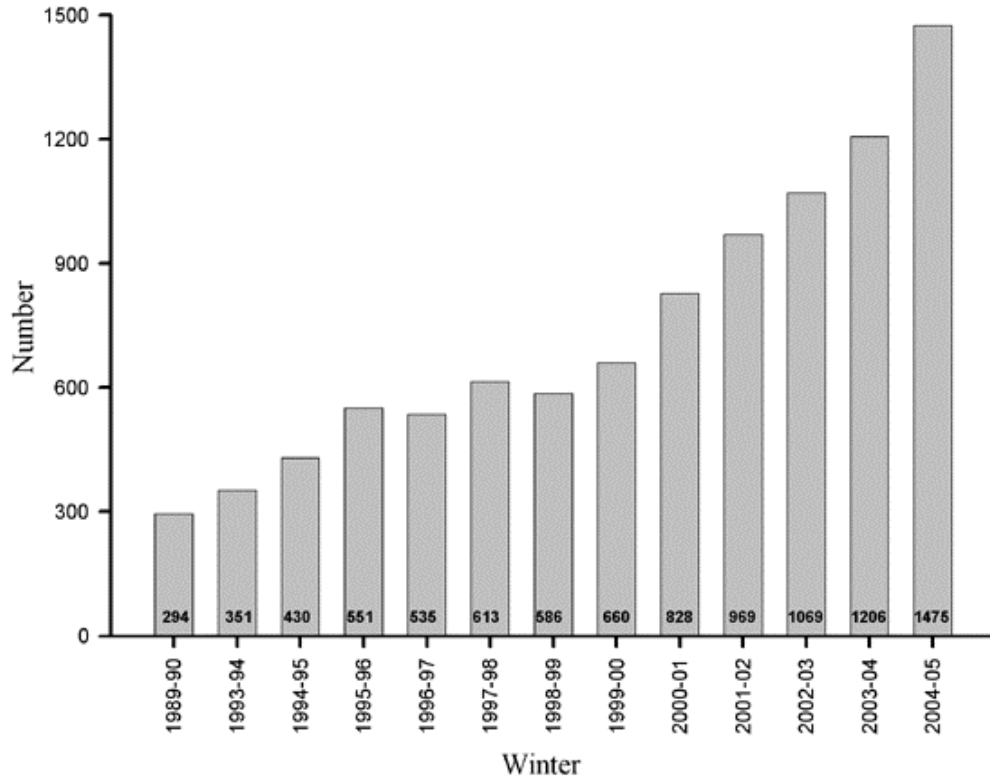


Figure 1 Known wintering Black-faced Spoonbill populations from winter 1989-90 to 2004-05.

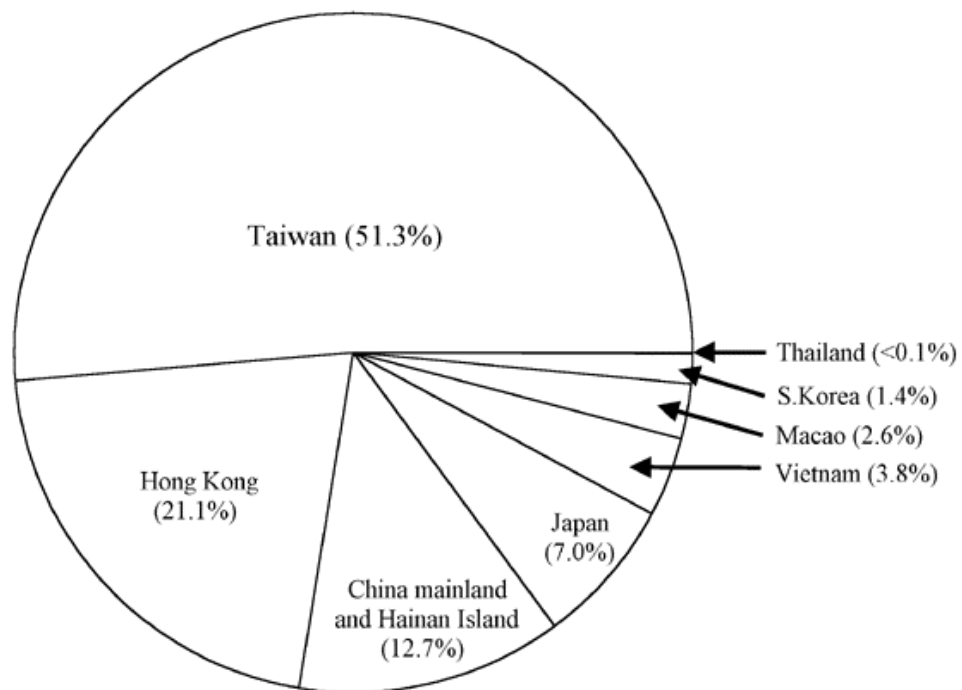


Figure 2. Percentages of Black-faced Spoonbills in different wintering areas during the 2005 international census.

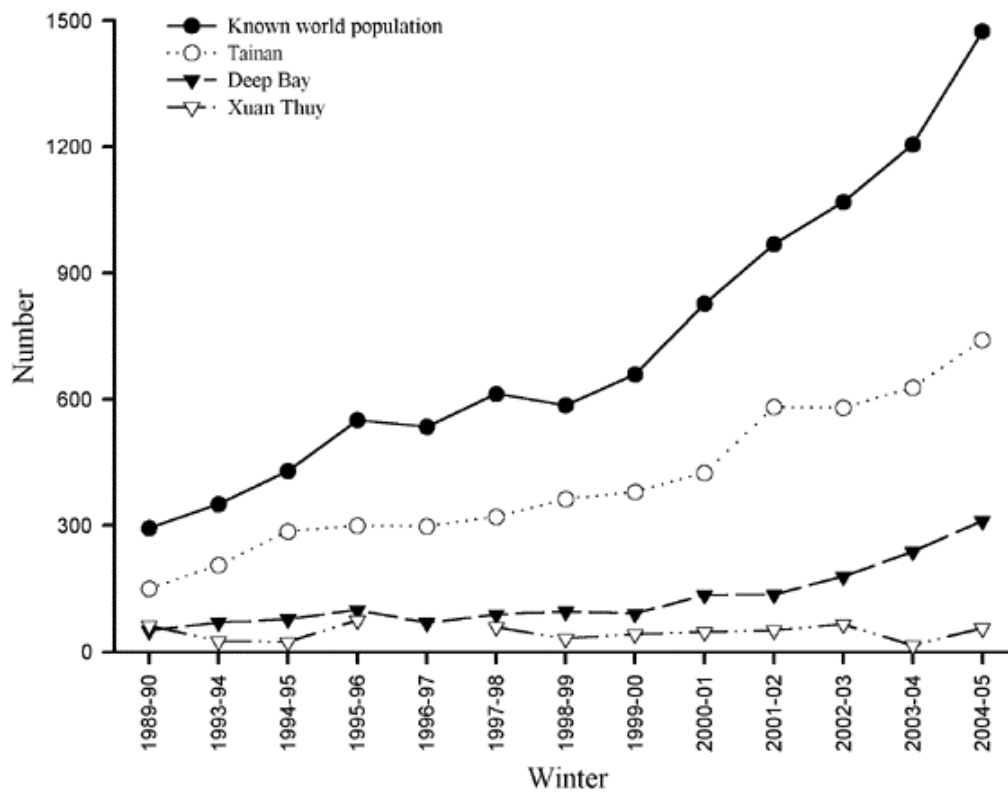


Figure 3. Trends of known Black-faced Spoonbills in the world and in three important congregation sites: Tainan of Taiwan, Deep Bay of Hong Kong, Red River Delta of Vietnam from the international censuses. Numbers were based on a review by Kennerley (1990) and table 3,4 and 6.

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Appendix

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Counts in Hong Kong (including Futian, Shenzhen) during the International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 2005. NC - no count; * No counts were assigned in 'outer' Deep Bay at 1700h and 1800h due to high water.

a) Counts on 21 January 2005

Place/Time	1600h	1700h	1800h
Mai Po Nature Reserve and boardwalk	120	197	200
Wo Sang Wai	10	17	19
Lok Ma Chau	0	0	0
Tsim Bei Tsui area, including environs of Wetland Park	95	18	18
'Outer' Deep Bay*	0	NC	NC
Futian	46	46	46
Total	271	278	283

b) Counts on 22 January 2005

Place/Time	1600h	1700h	1800h
Mai Po Nature Reserve and boardwalk	141	147	157
Wo Sang Wai	26	26	15
Lok Ma Chau	0	0	4
Tsim Bei Tsui area, including environs of Wetland Park	121	99	50
'Outer' Deep Bay*	0	NC	NC
Futian	9	39	48
Total	297	311	274

c) Counts on 23 January 2005

Place/Time	1600h	1700h	1800h
Mai Po Nature Reserve and boardwalk	139	126	70
Wo Sang Wai	0	0	0
Lok Ma Chau	17	17	17
Tsim Bei Tsui area, including environs of Wetland Park	64	38	40
'Outer' Deep Bay*	0	NC	NC
Futian	NC	NC	NC
Total	220	181	127

Appendix 2. Figure of numbers of Black-faced Spoonbills in Hong Kong during the international censuses. Note that the number excludes the counts from Futian, Shenzhen c.f. Table 1.

