

Queen of the Flyway meets King of the Flyway in Meinypil'gyno!

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'Queen' of the Flyway at the breeding ground, 2014

Nikolay Yakushev

With the reappearance of our much-loved female Spoon-billed Sandpiper, Green 05, also labelled as the 'Queen of the flyway' (see also https://www.bcst.or.th/essential_grid/queen-of-the-flyway/) at Khok Kham for her sixth successive winter, we can all breathe a collective sigh of relief that she has completed another migratory journey safely. She was first found (as pretty much always) by stalwart BCST observer, one of the Founder Members of the Khok Kham Conservation Club, Suchart Daengphayon on her usual salt-pan winter territory on 27 October 2018.

SBS Lime 05 was already adult when first ringed and flagged on the breeding grounds in Chukotka, NE Russia, 20 June 2013. Her breeding history is:

2013 2 head-started chicks reared to adulthood and released (White JA, PA).

2014 3 head-started chicks reared to adulthood and released (White Y8, E9, J9).

2015 4 head-started chicks reared to adulthood and released (White L7, M7, P7, U7). Her son, P7, from 2015, has been seen the last three winters, **2015**, **2016** and **2017** at Pak Thale, Phetchaburi, and we hope he will appear again this year.

2016 4 head-started chicks reared to adulthood and released (White 0T, 0U, 0V, 0X). Green 05



'King' of the Flyway at the breeding ground, 11 June 2018

Pavel Tomkovich

and her mate also fostered a chick (Lime M3) from another nest.

2017 4 head-started chicks reared to adulthood and released. Two more chicks were also produced from a replacement clutch, and were flagged (Lime P6, T6).

From 2014–2017 she was paired with the same male, Lime 10 (a different male from her mate in 2013).

In **2018**, Lime 10 did not return, so she was paired with a third male. In fact this male is Lime 27!

The new male Lime 27 is almost matching the feat of his new partner Lime 05. Only 3 days later than in Khok Kham local guard Ren Naung Soe found Lime 27 on Nan Thar Island on 30 October 2018, returning for the fifth consecutive winter: The King of the Flyway!! He is an offspring of male 01, the monumental 01 that for so many years accompanied us in Meinypilgyno and also Yangkau at its regular stop over site (see previous newsletters). After being solitary last year 'The King' moved for

7 km from his former territory (the largest ever distance recorded for males) and mated with ‘The Queen’. Their first clutch was taken for head-starting (3 chicks White 4C, 4E and 4H released) and from a replacement clutch they hatched two more chicks, receiving lime flags 9V and 9X.

So this outstanding ‘Queen’, aided by three different male consorts, has produced no fewer than 24 chicks, and fostered one more, in six successive breeding seasons!

Because ringing and flagging enables individuals to be recognized, it adds greatly to scientific knowledge concerning population dynamics and movements (Green 05 has often been seen at Tiaozini, an important Chinese staging area). But more than this – it also strengthens our emotional connection to birds as individuals, our fellow living beings, which is no less important.

While the ‘King’ seems secured on Nan Thar Island soon becoming a protected area (see page 38-39), the situation in Khok Kham is less than favourable for Spoon-billed Sandpipers and other waders.

In mid-July 2016, the Khok Kham Conservation Club alerted BCST to the fact that a solar farm was in the process of being constructed on 7 ha of land in the Flyway Network Site at Khok Kham, Samut Sakhon Thailand, and asked BCST to intervene. The land was immediately adjacent to the core area of the site which normally supports > 10,000 wintering waders, including 1-2 Spoon-billed Sandpipers. We immediately phoned ONEP (the Office of Natural Resources, Environmental Policy & Planning, which is the focal agency of government for the Flyway Agreement, and were disturbed to find that they knew nothing about the (then, already ongoing) construction. The land at Khok Kham is a salt-farming cooperative under the Department of Cooperatives,



‘Queen’ of the Flyway at Khok Kham in 2017

BCST

Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries. Apparently it is permissible for a certain percentage of cooperative land to be used for other purposes, and solar farms are considered acceptable in this regard. The land-holder would have benefitted financially from the project.

By the time the project was halted thanks to government intervention, one or two months later, a laterite road had already been built into the salt-pans and concrete bases for solar panels installed into what was previously salt pans. Those concrete bases remain, though the site is still used for roosting by waders.

Unfortunately, salt-farming is a declining industry. It is a sustainable, environmentally appropriate activity for coastal areas of the Inner Thai Gulf, conducted by smallholders, the profitability of which has been undercut by destructive subterranean “fracking” of onshore salt deposits elsewhere in Thailand (in the inland Khorat Plateau of the North-east Thailand). Fracking for salt causes salinization of farmland.

Sripanomyom et al. (2011) found that the best predictors of shorebird numbers and diversity in the Inner Gulf of Thailand were onshore salt-pans

in combination with offshore mudflats. Tantipisanuh et al. (2016) showed that the area of salt pans in the Thai Inner Gulf declined by 20% during 1990–2010, mostly lost due to conversion to aquaculture ponds and urban sprawl. At the Khok Kham Cooperative alone, most of the salt pans have been lost, and converted to aquaculture ponds. In 1937, there were 300 families conducting salt-farming there. By 2016 there were just 28 families utilising less than 2 sq km of land.

Hopefully, many of you may chance to watch her or him once in your life! I am going to visit her tomorrow as I did it for 6 years by now :-)

References:

Sripanomyom, S., Round, P. D., Savini, T., Trisurat, Y. and Gale, G. A. 2011. Traditional salt-pans hold major concentrations of overwintering shorebirds in Southeast Asia. *Biol. Cons* 144: 526–537.

Tantipisanuh, N., Gale, G. A. and Round, P. D. 2016. Incidental effects from road construction on one of Asia's most important wetlands: the Inner Gulf of Thailand. *Pacific Conservation Biology* 22: 29–36



Construction works at Khok Kham, Sep 2016

Phil Round