

The International Black-faced Spoonbill Census 2017



The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society
Press Release

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An encouraging news for conservation at the beginning of 2017! International co-operation brought us rewarding results that the number of the globally Endangered Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*) recorded a new high in the International Census 2017 conducted in January. There were 3,941 spoonbills recorded, which were 585 birds more than the record of 3,356 birds in 2016 (17.4%). The 2017 International Black-faced Spoonbill Census took place on 13-15 January. More than 100 researchers, conservationists, nature reserve staffs and volunteers joined this census and surveyed over 70 sites in this region.

Yat-tung Yu, Research Manager of The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society and the international coordinator for the census, mingled surprise and concern, “population in Taiwan has a long term increasing trend and hence the increase in number in Taiwan, up to the global population, are as expected, but to a surprisingly large extent. However, the situation in other places is not as optimistic. An example is that the trend of the Deep Bay area of Hong Kong and Shenzhen was apparently decreasing after the peak of 462 spoonbills recorded in 2010. Despite a mild increase of 4 spoonbills in the Deep Bay area this year, there were still 87 spoonbills less than the peak number. There was also a decrease of 9% in number in coastal China this year, after the high number recorded last year. We are worrying if it will become a decreasing trend. We must carefully investigate if the opposite trends at different sites possibly attributed to differences wetland management or climate change.

The largest wintering ground was still the Zengwun Estuary of Tainan, where a total of 1,810 spoonbills were recorded. Together with other big flocks found at Chiayi County and Kaohsiung, and small flocks in other areas, Taiwan had a total of 2,601 spoonbills recorded during the census, contributing 66% of the global population. Regarding to the Deep Bay area, we had only a total of 375 individuals recorded this year, which was similar to 371 spoonbills counted in 2016. There is an interesting contrast that Taiwan and Deep Bay, being the two largest wintering



grounds for this species, seem to have a different prospect.”

We found the number of the spoonbills at the Mai Po Nature Reserve continuously decreased, while the number in the Hong Kong Wetland Park had an increasing trend. In the past, we usually found the wintering spoonbills gathered in one big flock at the Mai Po Nature Reserve, but now, the surveyors reported several small flocks scattered around the whole Deep Bay area. The reason of this change is still not understood and perhaps it is related to the habitat quality of the sites, natural fluctuations or changes of bird behaviours.

We have recorded more Black-faced Spoonbills in this census, but the situation is not the same in all the sites. Increases were found in Japan and Vietnam, where a total of 433 individuals were counted in Japan, being the first time recording over 400 individuals, and 62 were found in the Red River Delta of Vietnam, having a boost from the exceptionally low number of nine spoonbills in 2016. On the other hand, the number of spoonbills decreased in mainland China, Macao and South Korea, and was stable in Deep Bay area. It reflects that less spoonbills migrated along the China coast to the Deep Bay. It is suspected that the habitat quality of several sites along southern coastal China declined, therefore more spoonbills preferred wintering in Taiwan.

To understand the selection criteria of wintering sites of Black-faced Spoonbills, The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society collaborated with Dr. Sung Yik-hei, lecturer of Department of Biology, The Hong Kong Baptist University, to analyse all the data and information collected from this international census throughout the decades. Human disturbance was found to be an important factor and the results recently published in an international peer-reviewed Journal *Bird Conservation International*.

Dr. Sung explained, “We found annual increase of 8% in global population, from 535 spoonbills in 1997 to 2,726 in 2014, and there was a remarkable increase of 17% in 2017. The populations in protected sites and sites with little human disturbance obviously had more pronounced increase. Therefore, controlling human activities, especially at wintering sites, would be important in conservation management planning. The future of the Black-faced Spoonbill is not yet secured despite of the increasing trend in recent years. Since most spoonbills congregate in only two sites, southern Taiwan and Deep Bay, therefore any outbreak of epidemic or poisoning incident could wipe out a large proportion of the population. To enhance site



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management, more scientific researches including satellite-tracking and environmental monitoring are also needed to better understand their home range, habitat preference in wintering site, and if the birds would change wintering sites across years. ”

The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society has been coordinating the International Census since 2003. The census results are highlighted below:

- A total of 3,941 birds were recorded in 2017 census, having 585 birds more than the 3,356 birds recorded in 2016, which is an increase of 17.4%;
- The largest wintering population was still found in Taiwan with a figure of 2,601 individuals, accounting 66% of the world population, which was 541 individuals (equivalent to 26.3%) more than the 2,060 individuals recorded in 2016; the largest wintering site, Zengwun Estuary in Tainan, had a total of 1,810 individuals, which was 46% of the world population;
- Deep Bay, including Hong Kong and Shenzhen, recorded 375 individuals, accounting 9.5% of the world population. It was 4 birds more than in last year (371 individuals in 2016), representing a mild increase of 1.1%;
- There was a sharp increase in number of Black-faced Spoonbills in Vietnam during the census in January, from 9 individuals recorded in 2016 to 62 individuals in 2017. Human disturbances was suspected to be the major reason of the previous year's unusual low number;
- Increase was also noted in Japan. The number was 433 individuals, being the first time to record more than 400 birds;
- Decrease was also recorded in South Korea, mainland China and Macau. The number in mainland China decreased by 37 individuals, which means a decrease of 10.1%;
- Two Black-faced Spoonbills were recorded in Thailand during this winter, but unfortunately it was not found during the census. No spoonbill was reported in Cambodia and the Philippines this winter.

Locations surveyed in this census include South Korea, Japan, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan, Jiangsu, Taiwan, Hong Kong & Shenzhen, Macau, Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia.

The Society would like to take this opportunity to thank all regional organizations and volunteers for their participation in the census, contributing to the smooth conduct of this census throughout all years and therefore better conservation of Black-faced Spoonbill in the region.



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表 Table 1 :

2017 年各地普查結果 Results of different locations in 2017 Census

地區 Place	2015 數量 No. in 2015 (佔總數% % to total)	2016 數量 No. in 2016 (佔總數% % to total)	2017 數量 No. in 2017 (佔總數% % to total)	趨勢 Trend (比較 2016 年 against 2016)
台灣 Taiwan	2,034 (62.4%)	2,060 (61.4%)	2,601 (66.0%)	+541 隻 (+26.3%)
香港和深圳 (后海灣) Hong Kong & Shenzhen (Deep Bay)	411 (12.6%)	371 (11.1%)	375 (9.5%)	+4 隻 (1.1%)
中國大陸 Mainland China (浙江 Zhejiang、福建 Fujian、廣東 Guangdong、 廣西 Guangxi、海南 Hainan、上海 Shanghai、 江蘇 Jiangsu)	330 (10.1%)	434 (12.9%)	397 (10.1%)	-37 隻 (-8.5%)
日本 Japan	371 (11.4%)	383 (11.4%)	433 (11.0%)	+50 隻 (+13.1%)
越南 Vietnam	40 (1.2%)	9 (0.3%)	62 (1.6%)	+53 隻 (+589%)
澳門 Macau	55 (1.7%)	61 (1.8%)	44 (1.1%)	-17 隻 (-27.9%)
韓國 South Korea	31 (0.9%)	38 (1.1%)	29 (0.7%)	-9 隻 (-23.7%)
菲律賓 The Philippines	0* (0.0%)	1* (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	沒有改變
泰國 Thailand	2* (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2* (0.0%)	沒有改變
柬埔寨 Cambodia	1* (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	沒有改變
總數 Total	3,272	3,356	3,941	+ 585 隻 (+17.4 %)

附註: * 並非於普查日錄得，故不計算在總數之內。

Note: * Not included in the total as the toll was not taken on the survey date.



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圖 Diagram 1 :

1989-90 至 2016-17 年冬季的全球黑臉琵鷺數量

Numbers of wintering Black-faced Spoonbill in the world from 1989-90 to 2016-17

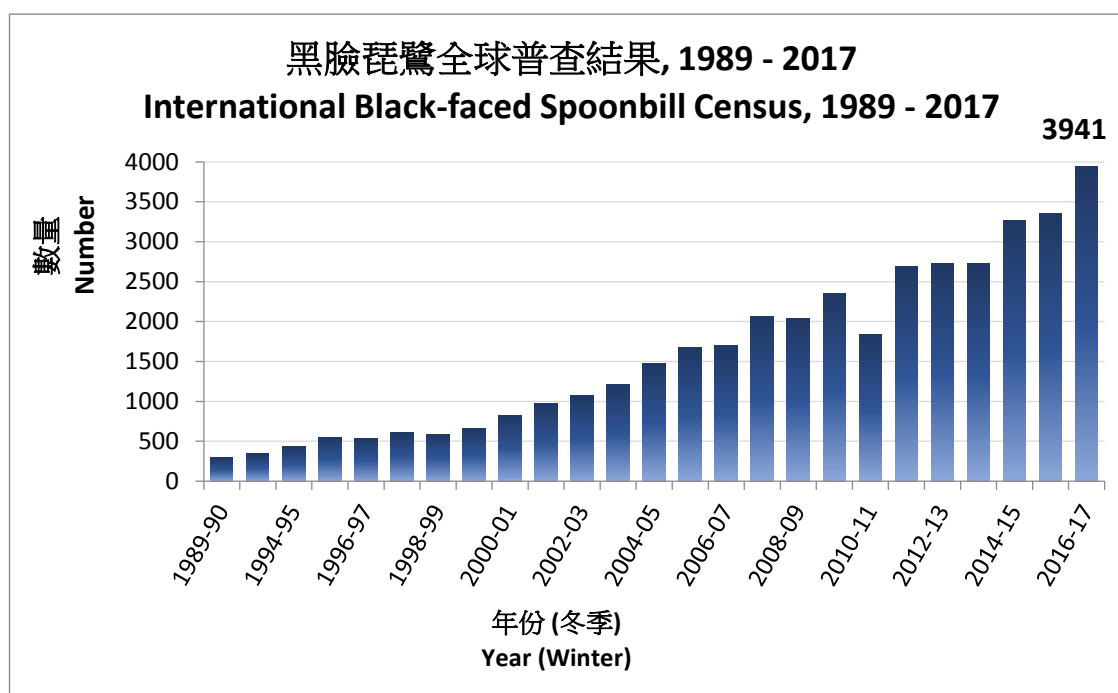
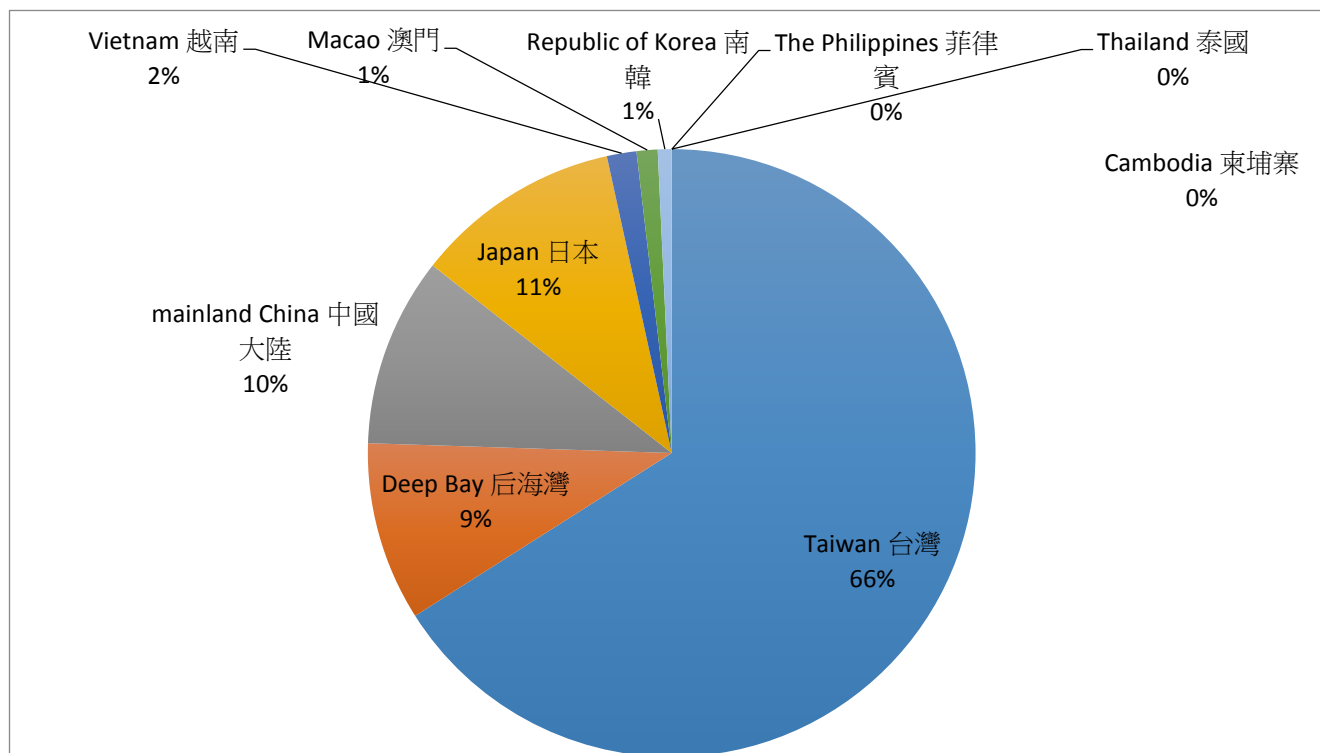


圖 Diagram 2 :

2017 全球同步普查期間黑臉琵鷺在不同越冬地的全球百分比

Proportion of wintering Black-faced Spoonbill at different locations to the global total in 2017 International Census





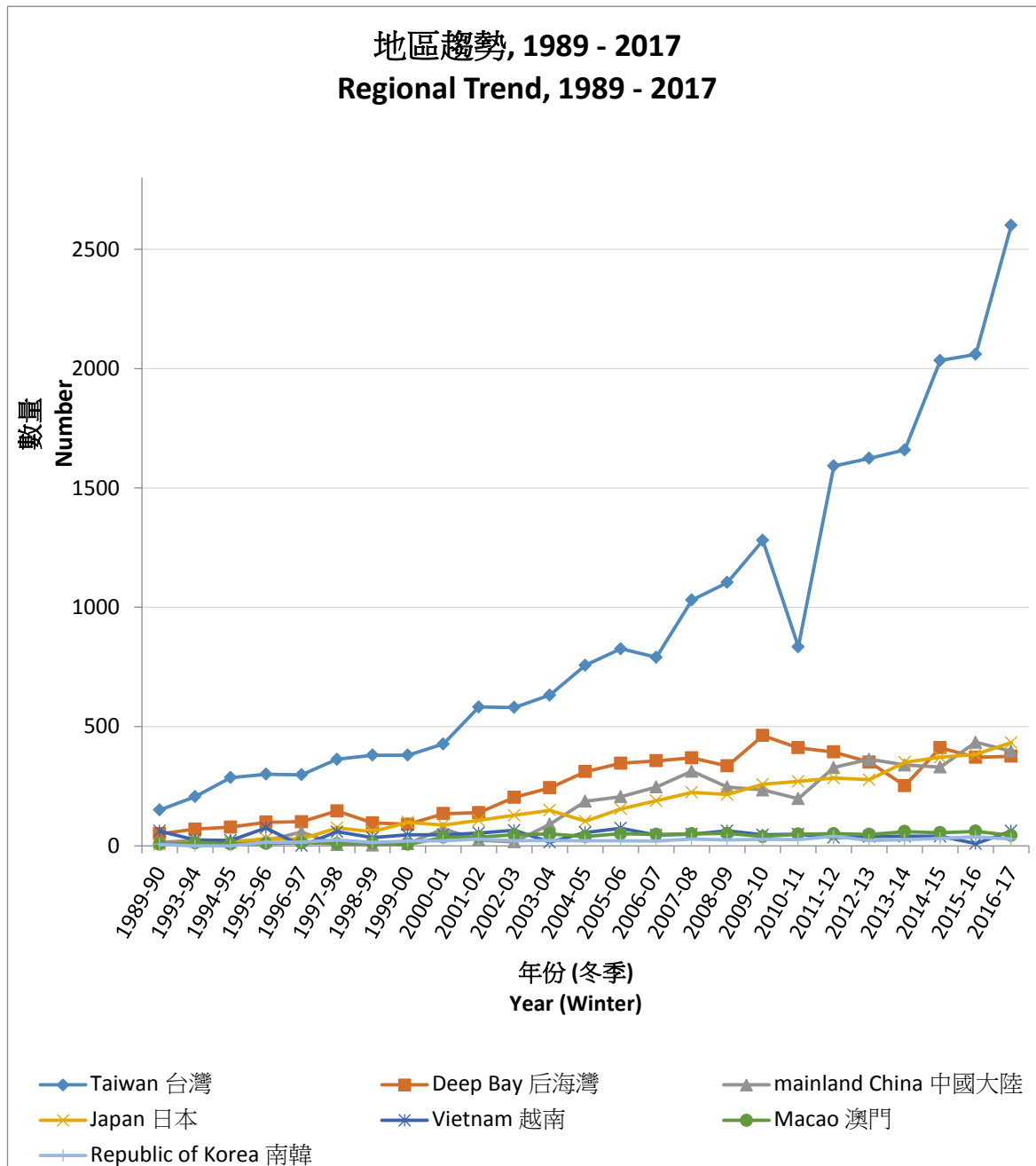
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圖 Diagram 3 :

比較七個主要越冬地區的已知黑臉琵鷺數量趨勢

A comparison of the trends of the known global population of Black-faced Spoonbill at main wintering areas



Appendix 3: Black-faced Spoonbill Fact Sheet

Black-faced Spoonbill belongs to the Threskiornithidae family in the Ciconiiformes order. There are 35 species in the order and only 6 are spoonbills. African Spoonbill lives in Africa, while Roseate Spoonbill lives in the Americas. Yellow-billed Spoonbill and Royal Spoonbill are mainly found in the Australia, while Eurasian Spoonbill and Black-faced Spoonbill are found in Asia. Among the six species, Black-faced Spoonbill is the only one listed in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

Black-faced Spoonbills are named for their black facial skin and the spoon-shaped beak. Its Chinese name refers to the beaks which resembles Chinese instrument *pipa*. The Spoonbill is an elegant bird with slender feet and snow white wings.

Body	Larger than the Little Egret with a body length of 75-82cm
Face	Extensive black facial skin, sometimes with yellow patches on cheeks
Plumes	Golden plumes on chest, neck and nape during breeding season
Foraging Behaviour	Feed on shrimp and fish at shallow water habitat by swiping with their spoon-shaped beak

Migration Route

Black-faced Spoonbill is a migratory bird. They leave their wintering sites in spring and return to their breeding sites in the north for the life event. In autumn, they back to the wintering sites, and the cycle repeats. In order to find out their migration route, researchers fit satellite trackers on the Spoonbills. Some of the spoonbills flew to breeding sites at Liaoning in China, west coast of DPRK and Republic of Korea, or islets near Vladivostok in Russia, after they left the wintering sites in Taiwan and Hong Kong. They shows courtship behavior and mates around May and June. Chicks usually hatch after around a month of incubation, and are able to leave the nest five weeks later, then become independent from their parents after another month.

In Hong Kong, Black-faced Spoonbills are usually encountered on the mudflats of Deep Bay and the Mai Po Nature Reserve, and roost in the Reserve at night. They are also often seen feeding in Hong Kong Wetland Park, Lok Ma Chau, Fung Lok Wai, Nam Sang Wai and San Tin, and are sometimes recorded in other places such as Starling Inlet and Tai Po.



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Appendix 4: Guidelines for using the following photos

1. Copyright belongs to photographer, the photos could only be used for this news report,
2. Please delete the photos after use,
3. If there is any enquiry about the photos, please contact Mr. Lo Wai-yan on 2377 4387 or 9309 6764,
4. Please acknowledge the photographer/organization of each photo (e.g. TSE Wai Lun / HKBWS).
5. Link: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7lwjmkqgz7l1rp8/AAD2-U28fdttfc02Y_uoqieGta?dl=0



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檔案名稱 File Name	照片描述 Description	攝影者 / 機構 Photographer / Organization
Ivan_Tse_1	米埔自然保護區內的水池中亦有大群黑臉琵鷺棲息覓食。 Black-faced Spoonbills found feeding in a fishpond in the Mai Po Nature Reserve.	謝偉麟 / 香港觀鳥會 Tse Wai Lun / HKBWS
Ivan_Tse_2	為黑臉琵鷺配上顏色腳環可以研究牠的遷徙路線。這隻琵鷺上的左腳有紅藍色腳環，右腳也有一個刻上編號 E02 的紅色長環，這鳥是在 2010 年 6 月在韓國出生，現時年齡為 6 歲 9 個月。 Black-faced Spoonbill was fitted with colour rings for studying migration route. This bird carries red and blue rings on left leg and a long red band (with code 'E02') on right leg. This bird was born in June 2010, now it is in age of 6 years and 9 months.	謝偉麟 / 香港觀鳥會 Tse Wai Lun / HKBWS
Owen_1	黑臉琵鷺的頭像，清楚看到黑色的面皮及湯匙的喙。 Portrait of a Black-faced Spoonbill. It shows black face skin and a beak like a spoon.	Owen / 香港觀鳥會 Owen / HKBWS



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Lok_Ching_Wa_1	黑臉琵鷺的食物主要是魚蝦及其他水生動物。 Main diets of Black-faced Spoonbills are fish, shrimp and aquatic invertebrates.	Lok Ching Wa / 香港觀鳥會 Lok Ching Wa / HKBWS
Helen_Fong_1	成年黑臉琵鷺全身羽毛為白色，包括翼尖。 Adult Black-faced Spoonbill has all white feathers including wing tips.	Helen Fong / 香港觀鳥會 Helen Fong / HKBWS
黑臉琵鷺 _Black-faced Spoonbill	在后海灣內覓食，休息及結集的越冬黑臉琵鷺 Feeding, loafing and gathering of wintering Black-faced Spoonbills at Deep Bay	香港觀鳥會 / HKBWS
Austin_Ng_1	於 2013 年在韓國環誌的 S03，在淺水魚塘覓食。 S03, which was banded in South Korea in 2013, was feeding at a fishpond with shallow water.	Austin NG / 香港觀鳥會 Austin NG / HKBWS

