

APPENDIX

Final Report on CEPF Small Grant project

“Conservation planning for the Spoon-billed Sandpiper population of Mekong Delta, Vietnam”

Background

Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) is a critically endangered species breeding in Russia and wintering in SE Asia. Vietnam used to be one of key species wintering countries but following the 90% decline of the species in last 30 years the number of sites where SBS could be still found had declined dramatically. The survey done by Birds Russia in North Vietnam in Red River Delta and surroundings in 2008 had shown that most of sites known to be best SBS locations in the country don't have species anymore. Only about 120-200 breeding pairs of the species are left and it is under real threat of extinction in next 10-20 years.

Potentially Mekong Delta could be one of key remaining SBS wintering sites. It had several locations, where SBS was known to winter in Ben Tre, Ba Tri District and one more location (SBS recovery team data base). None of them had been monitored for over 15 years now. There is also big potential for finding more SBS in huge Mekong Delta. The previous waterbird census in Mekong Delta were likely missing important numbers of SBS as it was focused on general waterbird counts.

The key threats in other parts of the wintering range of SBS are bird hunting and habitat conversion. Both threats are clearly threatening waders and their habitats in Vietnam and Mekong Delta. If this project will not be implemented urgently it may happen that the remaining SBS concentrations will be finished by local bird trappers similar way we had seen it happening now in Myanmar and Bangladesh. Lack of awareness of local population on the need of protection of this bird species should be addressed as well. Urgent action is needed to identify the key sites and the level of threats build contacts with local communities and develop immediate conservation action to mitigate the threats.

Project aims:

- 1) identify the key sites where SBS are wintering in Mekong Delta;
- 2) evaluate the threats and identify key local contacts to work with;
- 3) propose the actions to mitigate the threats and initiate its implementation;
- 4) train Vietnamese observers to make sure the next steps of species survey and monitoring work could be done by them on their own under supervision of BirdLife Indochina;

Itinerary of the field works

Between November 29th and December 24th 2011 the first Spoon-billed Sandpiper (SBS) survey in southern Vietnam was conducted by Birds Russia and University of Sciences, National University of Ho Chi Minh City according with Agreement between Birds Russia and Indochina Programme of BirdLife International funded by Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Before survey we have received from ArcCona and Gill Bunting the general map of the Mekong Delta and adjoining territories and satellite images on which sites recommended visiting were marked because those sites should be potentially suitable for wintering SBS (Fig. 1). SBS was recorded in one of those sites (Can Gio area, Long Hoa District) on April 3, 2011 by Nguyen Hoai Bao and in November 2011 by Jonathan Ch. Eames.



Figure 1. Records of Spoon-billed Sandpipers in 2000th

Detail itinerary of our field group have shown on the Table 1.

Table 1.

Itinerary of SBS Survey in December 2011

Dates	Measures
21.11.2011	Arrival in Ho Chi Mihn
22-26.11.2011	Meeting, planning, shopping. Arranging and receiving of permissions
27.11.2011	Travel to Ben Tre, meeting with local authorities
28.11.2011	Survey at Binh Dai
29.11.2011	Survey at Binh Dai
30.11.2011	Survey at Binh Dai
01.12.2011	Survey at Binh Dai
02.12.2011	Survey at Ba Tri
03.11.2011	Survey at Ba Tri
04.11.2011	Survey at Ba Tri
05.11.2011	Survey at Ba Tri
06.12.2011	Drive to Ca Mau, meeting with local authorities
07.12.2011	Travel to Nam Can, boat to Bai Boi, Dat Mui national park
08.12.2011	Survey at Bai Boi, Dat Mui
09.12.2011	Survey at Bai Boi, Dat Mui
10.12.2011	Survey at Bai Boi, Dat Mui and travel back to Ca Mau
11.12.2011	Flight to Ho Chi Mihn and drive to Can Gio
12.12.2011	Survey at Can Gio
13.12.2011	Survey at Can Gio
14.12.2011	Survey on Than An Island, Saigon Delta
15.12.2011	Travel back to Ho Chi Mihn
16.12.2011	Drive to My Tho and Go Gong, meeting with local authorities
17.12.2011	Survey at Go Gong
18.12.2011	Survey at Go Gong
19.12.2011	Survey at Phu Tan, Ngang Island
20.12.2011	Survey at Phu Tan, Ngang Island
21.12.2011	Drive to Tra Vihn, survey at Hiep Thanh
22.12.2011	Survey at Truong Long Hoa
23.12.2011	Drive to Can Gio, survey at Can Gio
24.12.2011	Survey at Can Gio
25.12.2011	Travel back to Ho Chi Mihn
26.12.2011	Departure to Moscow

Participants

Our team consisted of 3 Russian (Vladimir V. Morozov, Eugeny A. Koblik, Nikolai N. Yakushev) and one Vietnamese ornithologists (Nguyen Hoai Bao). For the first 3 weeks one Vietnamese student (Nguyen Thang) was accompanied with us as well. Two others students were accompanied with main team for one week each. They were learnt to identify and count shorebirds taking into account possible future monitoring into areas important for waders and SBS.

Surveyed areas

We surveyed outer parts of Saigon River Delta and Thanh An Island (Ho Chi Minh Province, Long Hoa District), several outer parts of Mekong River Delta situated in Tieng Giang, Ben Tre and Tra Vinh Provinces and the most western Vietnamese sea coast at the Mui Ca Mau National Park and Dat Mui settlement vicinity (Ca Mau Province) (Fig. 2 & 3).

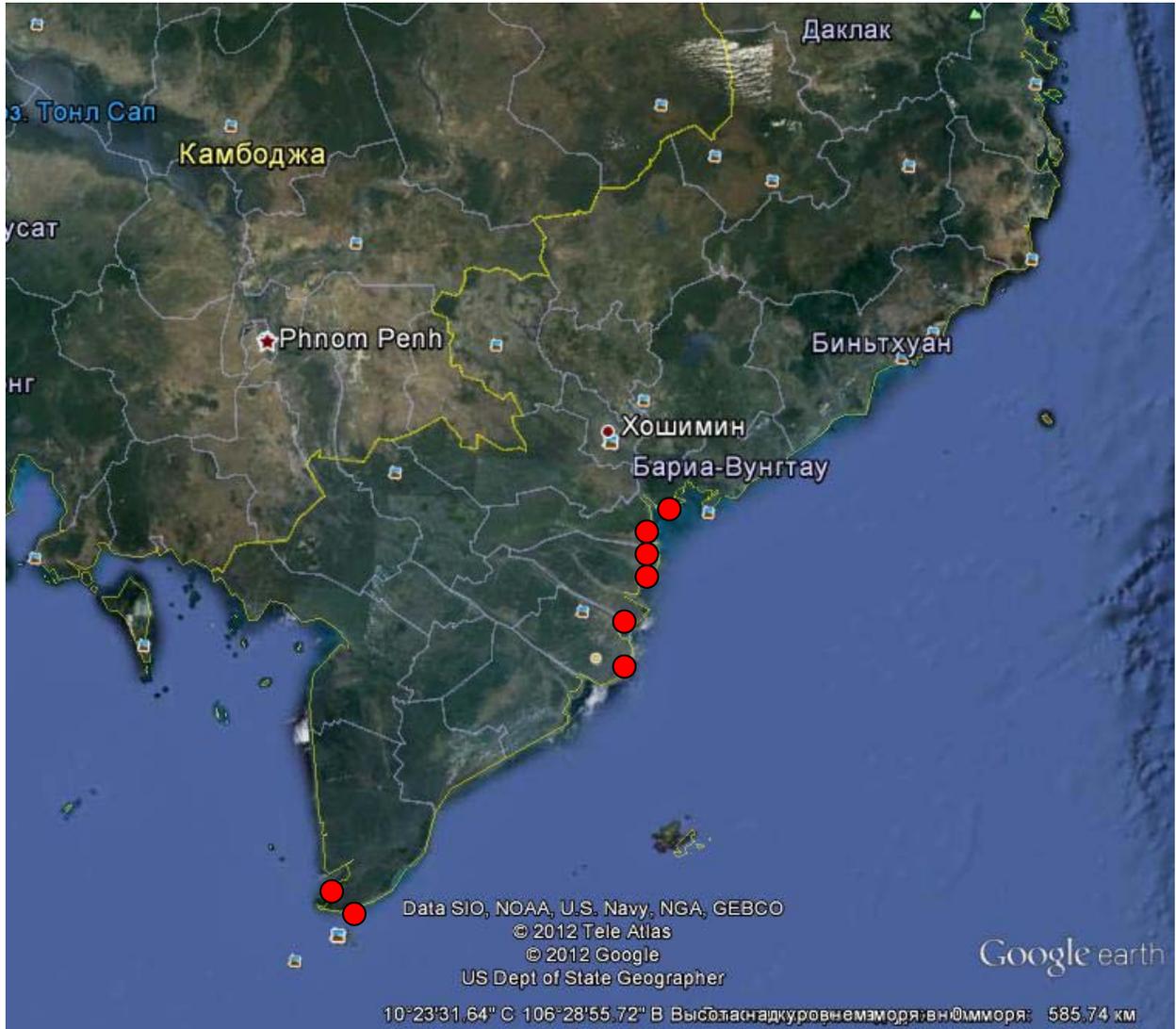


Figure 2. Study areas in Southern Vietnam (red circles)

Additionally to areas which we planned for survey ourselves SBS Task Force on the base of analysis of satellite images recommended for us to check some sites that could be suitable for wintering waders and Spoon-billed Sandpiper as well. It were mainly salt farms and shrimp ponds (yellow circles on fig. 3). Everything was done. Unfortunately, it was found the most of there sites (mainly shrimp ponds) are not suitable for shorebirds (too deep ponds, there are no feeding habitats for waders).

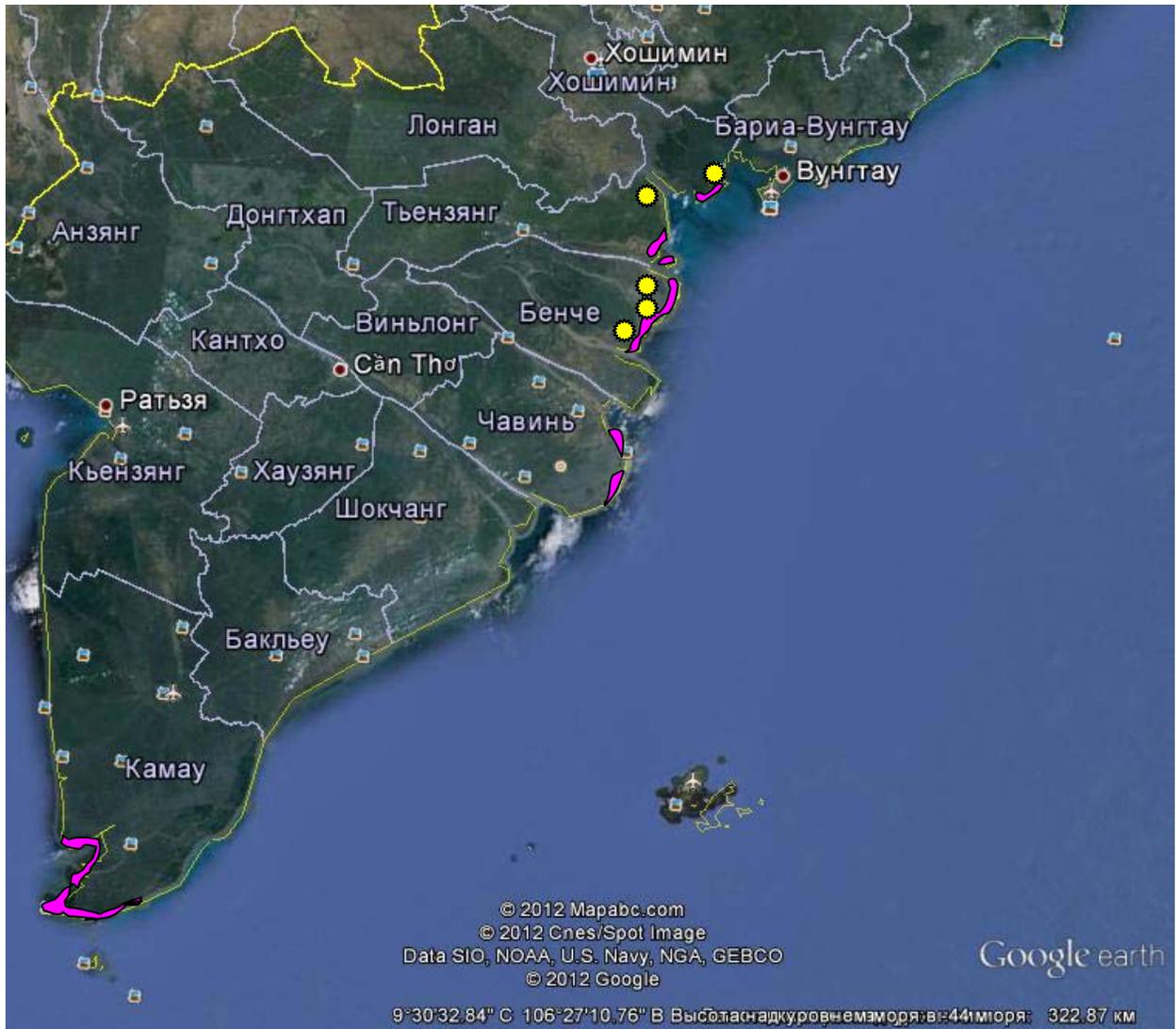


Figure 3. Surveyed areas (pink spots) and sites were recommended for survey by SBS TF (yellow dots)

Outputs:

1. *New SBS sites identified at Mekong Delta.*

After 18 days unsuccessful searches we did recorded SBS finally. They were found on two sites within one area that is situated at the both side of one of the main branch of the Mekong River Delta (Fig. 4). At least 5 Spoon-billed Sandpiper were recorded on December 17 and 18, on the outland mudflat located at the main branch of Mekong near from Tan Thanh village and small town Go Gong (Tieng Giand Province) and 3 we found out on December, 20 on mudflat of the offshore Ngang Island at the contrary side same Mekong's branch situated in Tieng Giang Province as well. Coordinates of the first record are 10°16'10,8" N, and 106°46'16,2" E, the second ones are 10°13'27" N and 106°46'54" E. The distance between these two places is about 6 km.

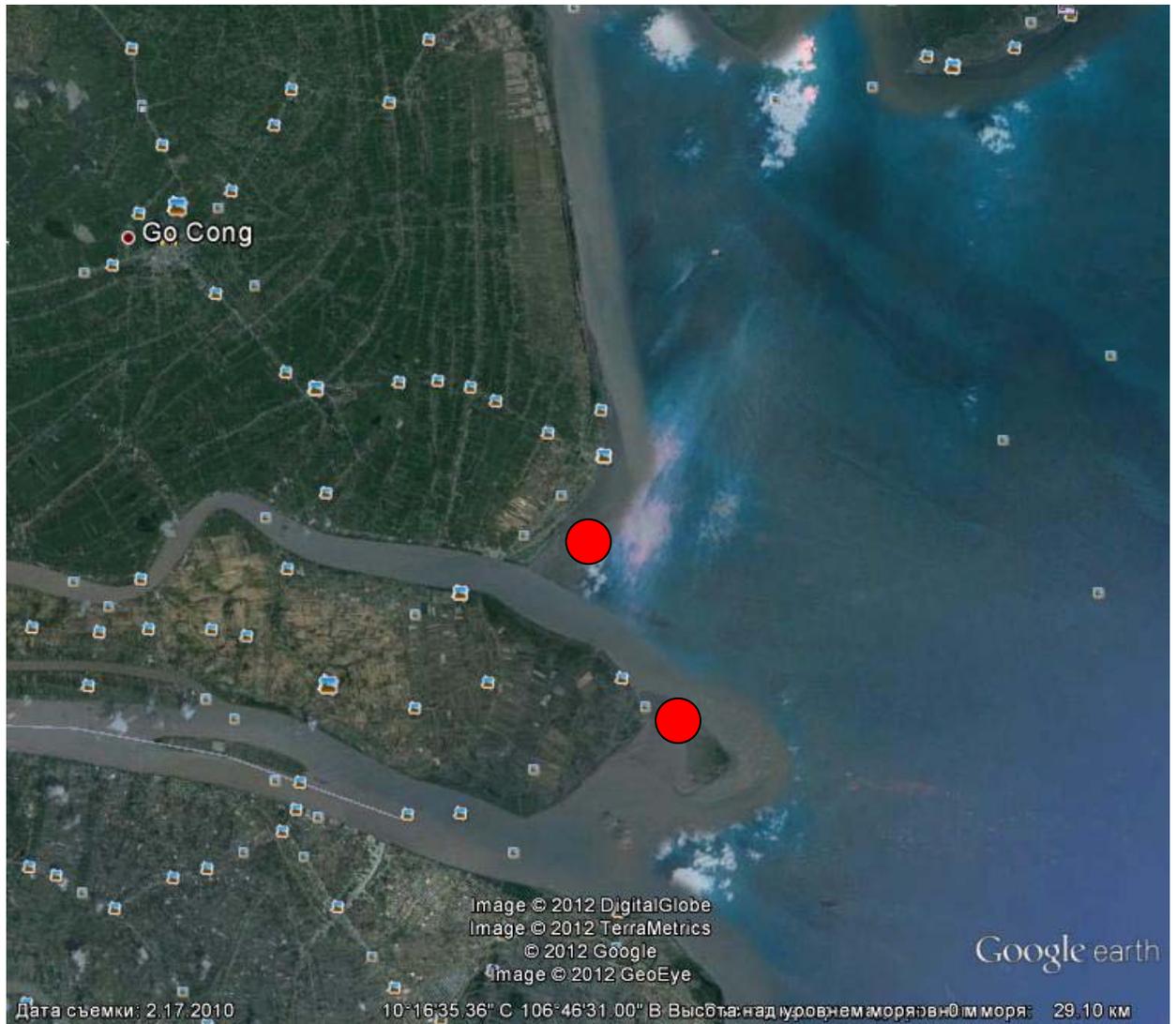


Figure 4. Locations of areas where SBS were found out.

2. Information on numbers and distribution of waterbirds in Mekong Delta, including potentially number of other threatened species, was collected and might be provided to BirdLife Indochina Program and Asian Waterbird Census Database (Appendix).

3. Potential IBAs are designated

Additionally to existing IBA (Bihn Dai & Ba Tri – Fig. 1) there is at least one area which certainly corresponded to international criteria for IBA. It is mudflats adjoining to the mouth one of the main branch of Mekong River – Song Cua Tieu, included Tan Thanh intertidal area and Ngang Island (Fig. 5, yellow spot). Total numbers of shorebirds in these two places reach 20 000 individuals and it is staging area of critical endangered bird species like Spoon-billed Sandpiper and Nordmann's Greenshank (Table 23-26 of the Appendix).

Second IBA is seashore and complex of salt farms nearly from the sea at Can Gio (Fig. 5, pink spot). Here winter about 6000 shorebirds including such threatened bird species as critically endangered Nordmann's Greenshank and Chinese Egret (table 15-20 & 29-32 of the Appendix).

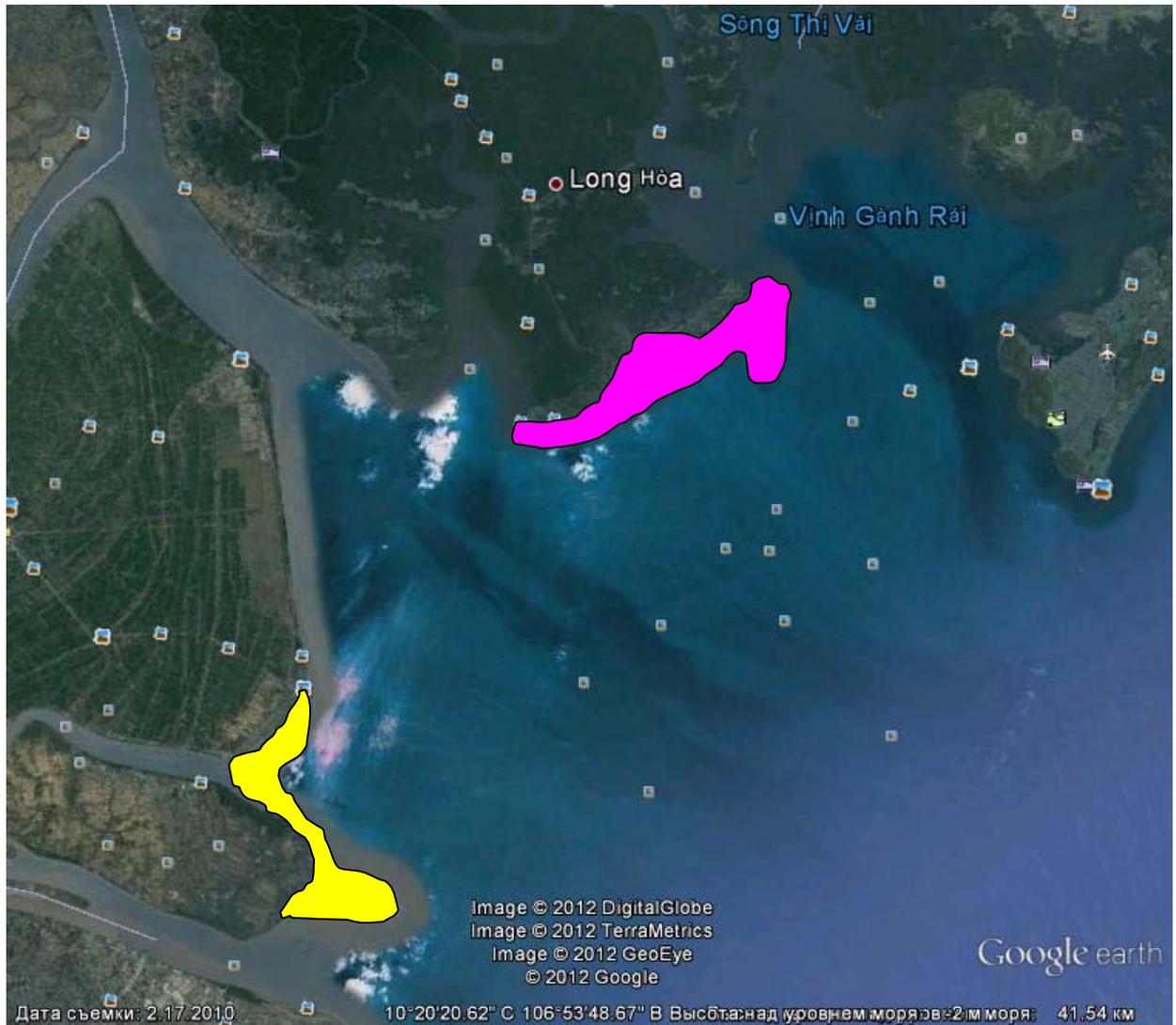


Figure 5. Areas in Mekong Delta corresponded to IBA according with international criteria

4. Trained team of observers from Vietnam is prepared to develop further SBS survey and conservation work threats evaluated and conservation action implementation initiated.

During our field works Mr. Nguyen Thang, student of the National University of Ho Chi Minh City, under our supervision got good training for shorebirds identification and count and nowadays his qualification quite enough and he could carry out survey of shorebirds himself. Moreover, we charged to him to count shorebirds in some key areas where Spoon-billed Sandpiper was observed by us in December 2011 and Mr.

Thang managed it successfully after our leaving to Moscow. He have received good results and was invited to attend at SBS Task Force Workshop in Palembang (Sumatra, Indonesia) where he gave oral presentation on results of his survey in January 2012.

5. Threats

We took no notice of any direct threat for existing Spoon-billed Sandpiper in outer part of Mekong Delta. There is no practice to catch waders with mist-nets by local people like it occur in northern and middle parts of Vietnam. However, there was one sighting of poaching when military persons tried to get waders shooting at big wader flock within Ba Tri IBA.

In our opinion more important might be indirect threats especially possible scarcity of food through overexploitation or unsustainable using of marine resources especially benthic invertebrate fauna of mudflats. Very low numbers of waders on mudflats at Dat Mui settlement (Ca Mau Province) are easily explained by low numbers shellfish, other molluscs, worms, crabs and other invertebrates on those areas (table 13, Appendix).

In contrast we have observed high numbers of waders there where mudflat invertebrate fauna is probably rich and people sustainable use such areas, for example, at Tan Thanh village (table 23-24).

Recommendations

1. So far as Spoon-billed Sandpiper is wintering bird species of Vietnam and it have long-time stops in this country and in Mekong Delta especially responsible governmental agencies in Vietnam have to include SBS to the list of protected species and to implement urgent conservation actions. Same situation with Nordmann's Greenshank that is absent in the list of protected species of Vietnam as well. BirdLife Indochina could address to governmental agencies with corresponding request.

2. International organizations on birds protection should address to responsible governmental agencies in Vietnam with request on creation protected territories at wintering grounds and staging areas of Spoon-billed Sandpiper and huge concentration of waterbirds (mudflats at Tan Thanh village, Ngang Island, Can Gio seashore area). By the first step to this direction could be declaration these territories as IBA.

3. It would be desirable to organize monitoring SBS wintering population in existing and potential IBA and to continue survey of still no investigated parts of Mekong River Delta.

Areas we are recommended for monitoring and survey are the follows:

- mudflats at Tan Thanh village and Ngang Island,
- seashore at Thoi Thuan settlement (Bihn Dai IBA),

- mudflats and salt farms at An Thui settlement (Ba Tri District, Ben Tre Province),
- Can Gio area.

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