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Longevity record of a colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor*

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Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* is endemic to the eastern fringe of Asia. The known population is small, only 1,200 individuals (Yat-tung Yu 2004) and therefore the species is listed as Endangered (BirdLife International 2001). In the 1990s, to rescue this species from the brink of extinction, conservationists started to study its previously poorly known distribution. On 14 July 1995, the first two Black-faced Spoonbill chicks were colour-ringed in a breeding colony in North Korea. Both birds were given a yellow ring on the left tibia; on the right tibia one bird was given a red ring over a green one and the other had a red ring over a blue one. Both birds were sighted in the first winter; the former in Japan and the latter in Vietnam (S. Chan *in litt.* 2005). The first bird was also seen again in its fifth winter and thereafter several times. Later, some tens of individuals were captured and marked with unique colour-ring combinations in their wintering areas in Taiwan and Hong Kong for a satellite-tracking project in 1998 and 1999 (Ueta *et al.* 2002).



Plate 1. Colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* photographed at Mai Po, 4 November 2003. (Photograph by Yat-tung Yu).

OBSERVATIONS

On 9–19 December 1999, Cornelis Swennen and I visited Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve, Red River delta, Vietnam to study the wintering ecology of Black-faced Spoonbills. On 15 December, we noticed a feeding spoonbill in a drained aquaculture pond. Through a 38× telescope I saw that the bird had a yellow ring on the left tibia and red over green rings on the right tibia. The bird was identified as an adult by its red iris, black upper mandible with some transverse ridges in the middle, and an almost totally black lower mandible. The presence or absence of black tips on the primary feathers could not be established. The bird was not



Plate 2. Colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* photographed at Mai Po, 23 November 2004. (Photograph by Phippen Ho).

subsequently resighted in Xuan Thuy. However, I rediscovered the same individual in three successive winters in Mai Po, Hong Kong, on 5 November 2002, 4 November 2003 (Plate 1) and 29 October 2004. Subsequently, it was photographed on 23 November 2004 by Phippen Ho (Plate 2), and it was seen again on 23 December 2004 (Ma Tsz Kit *in litt.* 2005) and by S. Chan, K.W. Ma and myself on 29 December 2004. No other sightings of this bird have been recorded in Hong Kong or elsewhere.

DISCUSSION

To summarise the observations, this bird was recorded in its first winter in Japan, in its fifth winter in Vietnam, and its seventh, eighth and ninth winters in Hong Kong. By its fifth winter the bird's bare part colours resembled those of adults. Information about the age of maturity is lacking (Hancock *et al.* 1992, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992), but Melville *et al.* (1999) discussed the age of some captured individuals from the satellite-tracking project and stated that birds develop completely white primary feathers by their fifth calendar year. The bird also provides the first known longevity record: 9.5 years up to the last observation on 29 December 2004. The closely related Eurasian Spoonbill *P. leucorodia* lives up to at least 28 years (Cramp and Simmons 1977).

The date of its appearance in Hong Kong was very similar in the three consecutive years. Although Mai Po is not systematically searched for colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbills, this site is very well watched by birdwatchers and bird photographers. The observations may therefore indicate that the timing of migration is consistent. They also hint that birds may pass through Hong Kong to the wintering site in Red River delta. However, in 2004, the bird was still present at Mai Po on 29 December and in wing moult, indicating that it was wintering in Hong Kong. It may have changed its wintering location because feeding and loafing habitats in the Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve in Vietnam have become gradually degraded by human disturbance and

conversion of the intertidal flats into mangrove plantations (Yat-tung Yu and Swennen 2001).

Observations of colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbills become more difficult with time because the colour of rings fades through wear and from the sun. Observers should be cautious when identifying ring colours.

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Vocalisation of the White-eared Night Heron *Gorsachius magnificus*

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On 29 March 2003, I tape-recorded the territorial call of White-eared Night Heron *Gorsachius magnificus* near Chebaling Nature Reserve in northern Guangdong Province, south-eastern China. Prior to this, there appears to be no published description or tape recording of a vocalisation of this heron.

White-eared Night Heron has been known at this site for several years: sightings are regularly made along a small river near the reserve in the evening just before dark, sometimes in the morning before sunrise, and sometimes along the river at night.

On the evening of 27 March 2003, I saw an unidentifiable heron fly by just before dark. No vocalisations