

March 2026

2025 Update: ICFC Biome Shorebird Initiative

All of us at Biome want to thank you for supporting the successful array of projects contributing to our Shorebird Initiative and give you some updates for 2025.

The Shorebird Initiative is a strategic approach to shorebird conservation that we started in 2015 to support *direct actions* on the wintering grounds, where migratory shorebirds spend most of their year. A particular focus has been conserving non-breeding sites of shorebirds that breed in Canada, including the Red Knot, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Piping Plover, Whimbrel, and the Hudsonian Godwit. Another focus is endangered South American breeding waterbird/shorebird species (which nest from October to April): Hooded Grebe, Magellanic Plover, Diademed Sandpiper-Plover, and the Fuegian Snipe. And in four countries in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, we are going to the aid of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper.

The bottom line is that your support is making a difference!

Some project highlights:

Migratory Shorebirds on the Wintering Grounds

- Biome continues to target all known important non-breeding sites for the **Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper** in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and China. The project is protecting more than 100 “Spoonies” — out of a population estimated at 350–550. Also protected at these sites were 85,000 shorebirds representing 68 species, including globally endangered and near-threatened species such as Nordmann's Greenshanks, Great Knots, Red-necked Stints, Curlew Sandpipers, Eurasian Curlews, Asian Dowitchers, Red Knots, and Bar-tailed Godwits.

Spoonie population surveys show a continued annual decline of ~5%, which is a much lower rate of decline than before 2010, but not yet where we need to be. The just-published 2025–2035 Action Plan for the species will provide guidance. With support from Biome, up to three more Spoonies may carry satellite tags from Thailand north to Russia in the spring of 2026.

See Appendix of photos from this project.

- **In Mexico, at Golfo de Santa Clara**, during a four-month period (February—May), our project took action at an important site in Mexico where millions of grunion (sardine-like fish) spawn on the water's edge and thousands of Red Knots and other shorebirds feast on them. Our beach guardians (mostly local women) with help from the National Army cordoned off a 24,784-sq-km area of tidal beach. This protected the grunions and 13,600 shorebirds (20 shorebird species) from potential disturbance posed by 10,000 thousand tourists who drive onto the beach during Holy Week. At the site, Red Knot numbers were stable, with a minimum count of 4,200 individuals. The grunions are concentrated along a 1.3-km area in front of the village, and this is where staff and volunteers created a makeshift “museum” of

“palapas” constructed with wooden poles and roofing. The guardians spoke with 1,984 tourists of whom 90% expressed support for the fenced area.

- **In Chile** our partner Fundación Conservación Marina continued to expand a landscape-scale habitat corridor that extends from the headwaters of the Maullin River at Llanquihue Lake, down the river’s entire length to the rich coastal wetlands and offshore island archipelago. These sites host half of the Pacific coast population of **Hudsonian Godwits** as well as thousands of Whimbrels and other shorebirds. This coastal wetland reserve system was made possible by Biome’s support over the past 10 years, during which Conservación Marina established a deep engagement with local communities and businesses. Bird ecotourism has proven to be a successful driver for the local economy. Project outputs include public bird blinds and boardwalks, guide training sessions for professionals and volunteers, and the production of printed sanctuary guides, bird guides and posters. These books were distributed at the 12th Annual Bird Fair.
- **In Bolivia:** At the Barba Azul Nature Reserve, a growing number of **Buff-breasted Sandpipers** (now more than 3,000) stop on their southbound migration each fall. Biome partner Asociación Armonía has a program to demonstrate sustainable cattle ranching and this now uses cattle to manage grass heights to benefit specific shorebird species, with shorter grasses preferred by “Buffies” and Baird’s Sandpipers. Longer grasses are used by Golden Plovers and Upland Sandpipers. This grassland and palm forest reserve in the heart of the Beni Savanna will soon be expanded (with funding from others) from its current 11,000 hectares.
- **In Panama:** Our focus is on the conservation of the entire Maje Mountain watershed where our project partner Native Future is helping three Wounaan communities title and protect 30,000 hectares. A bird eco-tourism component includes boat trips in the lower estuaries where thousands of Whimbrels and other shorebirds winter along Panama Bay.

Endangered Nesting Waterbirds of Patagonia

- **In Argentina:** Working with Aves Argentinas and the Maca Tobiano Fund, we are conserving breeding **Magellanic Plovers** and **Hooded Grebes** on the remote windblown plateaus of Patagonia. **Breaking news: This breeding season, now underway, is becoming one of the most successful on record for both species!** The experiment using fencing to protect nests of Magellanic Plovers from predators resulted in 100% hatching success on the 15 nests “exclosed” from predators, while an additional 6 nests left without exclosures were lost to predators. Hooded Grebes formed a record 12 nesting colonies across hundreds of miles of plateau habitat and 146 chicks fledged and/or nearly fledged. This success is attributed to wind breaks shielding their floating nests and to the pre-season removal of invasive mink.
- *New this year,* our team at Maca Tobiano Fund focused on remote pairs of high-altitude **Diademed Sandpiper-Plovers** in the Andes. The bad news is that there has been a 90% reduction of nesting pairs since a survey was done there 15 years ago. A small number of nests were found, but there was time to test a predator exclosure, which showed that this species didn’t even hesitate when entering the fence to incubate its eggs. In the next breeding season starting in October this year, more pairs will be protected from local predators and the abundant grazing goats.

It takes collaboration by partners throughout the flyways to stop or reverse population declines of migratory birds. Each species of northern shorebird must find migratory stopovers in a dozen countries to find the food and rest they need to fly up to 24,000 kilometers roundtrip. We remain optimistic based on the success we have had to date. We thank our dedicated field partners and donors who share with us the dream of stringing together these sanctuaries along these migration pathways.

I am here to answer any questions you may have, and I thank you again for your concern and support of this work.

- Scott Hecker, Director of Conservation Partnerships and Field Engagement

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An Appendix follows.

APPENDICES

PHOTOS FROM BANGLADESH



Bay of Bengal survey | January 2025



Bay of Bengal survey, Bangladesh | January 2025 – inset map shows the survey route



Bay of Bengal survey, Bangladesh | January 2025

PHOTOS FROM CHINA



Hedneng primary school, Danzhou, Hainan conservation campaign



Conservation talk at Yingpan middle school, Guangxi



Education program on shorebirds and tidal flats in various SBS sites in China.



Mist-net and bycatch preventive brochure distributed to local people



PHOTOS FROM MYANMAR



Newly formed LCG from Htan Chauk Pin and Aung Thar Dan villages in Yangon Region



Mist net confiscation from a bird hunter (left); LCG and survey team patrolling (right)

PHOTOS FROM THAILAND



Salt production demonstration at Pak Thale



Pak Thale visitor center (left); “Chom Nok, Chon Dok Keaw, Long Reu Tak Len” Festival (right)



