

IELTS READING – Efforts to save a special bird – the spoon-billed sandpiper S12GT5



IELTS READING Efforts to save a special bird – the spoon-billed sandpiper Reading Practice Test has 10 Questions belong to the Environment / Wildlife Conservation.

Last year an international team of ornithologists devised a bold plan to rescue one of the world's rarest birds. Gerrit Vyn reports.

28 At first glance the spoon-billed sandpiper resembles other small migratory birds of the sandpiper family that breed across the Arctic. But it is the only one to have developed a flattened bill that flares out into a 'spoon'

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at the end, and that makes it special. If it becomes extinct, thousands of years of evolution will come to an end, which would be a real tragedy. The bird's Russian name, kulik-lopaten, means 'shovel beak', which is an apt description of a remarkable structure. The bill is 19 mm long and 10 mm wide near the tip and the edges are lined with sharp serrations, called papillae. Theories have varied as to how the bill functions; one suggestion is that the sandpiper sweeps it through the water in a similar fashion to its larger namesake, the spoonbill. But Nigel Clark, a leading authority on the sandpiper, says the comparison is misleading.

29 Until a few years ago, the spoon-billed sandpiper had never been fully documented, which added to its fascination. But an air of mystery is not helpful if you're a Critically Endangered species. So the organisation 'Birds Russia' decided to produce a photographic and audio record of this imperilled bird with the help of experts round the world. In May of last year, I joined the international expedition to one of the species' last breeding strongholds in North-East Russia. The primary aim of the two-and-a-half month expedition, however, was to collect eggs from wild sandpipers; those eggs would then be hatched in captivity nearby. Later, the chicks would be flown to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT) headquarters at Slimbridge in the UK, in order to establish a small, self-sustaining population there. These birds would provide a 'safety net', an insurance policy against the wild birds dying out.

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