



Baer's Pochard Task Force report to 9th Meeting of Parties to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership



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1. SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the activities by the Baer's Pochard Task Force in 2015 and 2016, the period between the 8th and 9th Meeting of Partners to the East Asian – Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP). Progress with implementation of actions in the Single Species Action Plan is also summarised (Appendix 1).

During 2015 and 2016, significant new knowledge was gained about the abundance and distribution of Baer's Pochard, including the discovery of several new breeding sites. Furthermore, awareness of the status of the species and the need for more targeted conservation effort was raised considerably. Despite this progress, it is clear that Baer's Pochard continues to face a serious risk of extinction in the wild and additional significant new effort is needed from 2017 in order to reduce this risk further.

Of greatest importance are:

- The protection and appropriate management of all sites currently known to support Baer's Pochard and targeted action to address harvesting; effective action on these issues may be sufficient to halt the ongoing decline
- Habitat restoration, particularly in NE China, is likely to be essential for population recovery

2. BAER'S POCHARD TASK FORCE COORDINATION

Activities since MoP8

1. Following the adoption of the Single Species Action Plan (SSAP) at MoP8, the EAAFP Baer's Pochard Task Force (BPTF) was formally established in 2015. Prof. DING Changqing was appointed Chair, Richard HEARN appointed Global Coordinator, Prof. CAO Lei appointed China Coordinator, and Sergey SURMACH appointed Russia Coordinator.
2. The BPTF website was set up <http://www.eaaflyway.net/our-activities/task-forces/baers-pochard-task-force/>
3. The Baer's Pochard SSAP was formally approved by the Scientific Council in April 2016 and published at <http://www.cms.int/en/document/action-plan-baers-pochard-aythya-baeri>.
4. DING Changqing attended the *International Workshop on Yellow-breasted Bunting and migratory land bird conservation* in Guangzhou, China, in November 2016 to meet national delegates from Russia, Mongolia, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar in order to meet each other, share information on the status of Baer's Pochard in each country, and to discuss the BPTF work.

Plans for 2017-18

5. Organise and hold a SSAP implementation meeting, ideally in early 2017, to determine how, and by whom, key actions in the SSAP can be taken forward.
6. Establish a China Working Group (CWG) for Baer's Pochard conservation.
7. Develop a National (China) Action Plan at a CWG workshop to be held at Beijing Forestry University in early December 2016, hosted by Prof. LEI Guangchun and DING Changqing.

3. RESEARCH, MONITORING, KNOWLEDGE GENERATION AND EXCHANGE

Activities since MoP8

8. During the past two years there has been a steady increase in the number of surveys and anecdotal observations of Baer's Pochard, which has improved the understanding of current population size, distribution and site use. Surveys have been conducted in various parts of the flyway, particularly in China.
9. In China, this work has been predominantly carried out by a team from Beijing Forestry University (BJFU), led by WU Lan, a post-doctoral researcher employed by BJFU since April 2016, and a team from China Wild Nature, coordinated by LI Qingxin. In addition, monitoring at sites in Shandong during 2016 was carried out by the Birdwatching Society of Qufu Normal University. Greater awareness among birdwatchers of the importance of looking for Baer's Pochard and reporting all sightings has augmented the results of these studies.
10. The highest total counts have been made during the winter, when the birds are typically most concentrated. The largest recent count was made at the end of October 2016, when a total of 283 was recorded over a 2 day period, comprising 168 birds at Hengshui Hu (Hebei Province), 86 at Taiping wetland (Shandong Province), 8 at Jiujiang (Jiangxi Province) and 21 at Huangpi (Hubei Province). This is the largest total population count since 2010/11 and, given the low coverage (since it was not part of a coordinated census), suggests the post-breeding population is likely to comprise at least 300 individuals.
11. Other recent high counts include 211 at Jiujiang on 27th March 2016, though few were reported elsewhere in winter 2015/16. A coordinated waterbird census of the central and lower Yangtze in January 2015, organised by WWF China (Wuhan office), located 125 Baer's Pochard, half of which were at Chong Hu (Hubei Province). At the same time, about 105 individuals were known to be wintering at other Chinese sites, including 84 at Taibai Hu (Shandong Province) and with a few reports from elsewhere the final total was 238 birds. The count data from 2014/15 and 2015/16 suggest that winter distribution varies considerably between years.
12. Away from China, a comprehensive census of potential wintering sites in central Myanmar was conducted in winter 2015/16 by BANCA. This census surveyed 22 sites during January, March and April 2016. At least 12 Baer's Pochard were found at Pyu Lake near Mandalay city in January, with at least four remaining until March. An additional four birds were recorded at two other sites, giving a total of 16 birds wintering at three sites in Myanmar during 2015/16 (Aung *et al.* 2016).
13. Significant new knowledge of the breeding range has been gathered since 2015. Of particular significance is that breeding is now known to occur as far south as the Yangtze floodplain in central China. One site near Wuhan (Hubei Province) was documented by Lu *et al.* (2015) in *BirdingASIA* and another was discovered in 2016 near Jiujiang (where around 200 birds also over-wintered; see above). Possible breeding has also been noted at other sites in the Yangtze floodplain.
14. Monitoring of breeding populations was conducted at five sites during late March to October 2016: (i) Huangpi; (ii) Hengshui Hu Nature Reserve, Hebei Province; (iii) Chenqiao Nature Reserve, Henan Province; (iv) Qufu, Shandong Province; and (v) Jiujiang. Due to extensive flooding, at least five nests were destroyed at Huangpi, however, successful breeding (at least

the hatching of ducklings) was recorded at all five sites, with at least 15 females producing a minimum total of 72 ducklings across these five sites.

15. Detailed monitoring continued at the main breeding site Hengshui Hu. Although accurate counts during the breeding season are difficult, it appears numbers are stable at around 15-25 pairs. Numbers present in late summer have been as high as 99 birds (on 6th October 2016) and it is believed such flocks are comprised entirely of locally-breeding birds and their young.
16. To determine the recent status of Baer's Pochard in northeast China, in May 2016 WU Lan and her team also conducted surveys and interviews with staff at 15 nature reserves and wetland parks that have all previously held breeding Baer's Pochard during the 1970s to 1990s. Five Baer's Pochard were found at Xianghai Nature Reserve on 12th May, but there was no evidence of attempted breeding. No records were reported from the other 14 sites during the past ten years.
17. Detailed waterbird studies at Muraviovka Park, Russia, as part of the Amur Bird Project, have not located any Baer's Pochard during the breeding season since the sightings in July 2013 (Heim *et al.* 2013). However, a male was seen in September 2015, highlighting again the potential of this vast area to support breeding Baer's Pochard (Heim 2016).
18. A conservation status update was published in *BirdingASIA* (Hearn 2015). [Download](#)
19. All records of Baer's Pochard are recorded in a database, maintained by WWT.

Plans for 2017-18

20. Continue monitoring of breeding birds, environmental factors and human impacts at all known breeding locations in China.
21. Carry out comprehensive surveys of potential breeding sites in 2017 and 2018, with particular focus on northern and central China.
22. Carry out annual coordinated mid-winter surveys to provide estimate of population size and trend.
23. Undertake a telemetry study to understand movements and site use.
24. Implement research to document habitat requirements and ensure suitable habitat is maintained at all known breeding sites.

4. SITE PROTECTION, MANGEMENT AND THREATS

Activities since MoP8

25. Only limited progress with site protection and management, and addressing key threats, has been achieved; all known breeding sites in China still lack an adequate level of protection and are at risk from unfavourable development.
26. WU Lan has engaged with authorities at Hengshui Hu to ensure they are aware of the need to consider Baer's Pochard in their decisions about site management.
27. Some engagement with local people has been made at the newly discovered wintering and breeding site at Jiujiang, which is threatened by unfavourable management activities.
28. WWF China (Wuhan office) have engaged with the Provincial State Forestry Bureau in Wuhan regarding protection of the Huangpi fishponds (see Lu *et al.* 2015).

29. At Taibai Hu, the Nansi Hu Provincial Nature Reserve intends to apply to become a National Nature Reserve. However, in the new zoning plan, Taibai Hu (the North Lake of this lake complex) has been excluded from the nature reserve area; meaning that development and exploitation of Taibai Hu will be legal. This is a significant threat to Baer's Pochard.
30. No information has been received about Khasan, the key site in Russia.

Plans for 2017-18

31. Liaise with local government and the Shandong Provincial State Forestry Bureau to maintain Taibai Hu as part of the Nansi Hu protected area.
32. Protection of all sites supporting Baer's Pochard remains a key priority for 2017-18. It is essential that all known sites are adequately protected at the earliest possible date and management plans are prepared that ensure habitat and other conditions required for breeding (*e.g.* lack of disturbance) are maintained.
33. Initiate study into the scale, methods and drivers of waterbird harvesting in China.

5. CAPTIVE BIRD MANAGEMENT

Activities since MoP8

34. Peter Smallbones (Paignton Zoo) appointed Baer's Pochard studbook keeper for the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA).
35. Jamie Toste (Minnesota Zoo) appointed Baer's Pochard studbook keeper for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) in North America.
36. In October 2016 the European captive stock stood at 90 males, 77 females and 13 unsexed birds, a total of 180 individuals. Of these, 89 are held by the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and the remainder were at 17 other collections. In 2015, 40 birds were reared in captivity, and in 2016 a further 13 birds were reared. In North America, captive holdings stood at 41 males and 35 females in eight collections.
37. New biosecure rearing and breeding facilities, approved under the EU Balai Directive, have been established at WWT Slimbridge.
38. A genetic analysis was undertaken of captive birds held by WWT, in collaboration with Cardiff University and funded by the Oriental Bird Club. The results indicated that Baer's Pochard and Ferruginous Duck are almost indistinguishable, at least in terms of the microsatellites analysed, and are thus genetically very closely related (Figure 1).

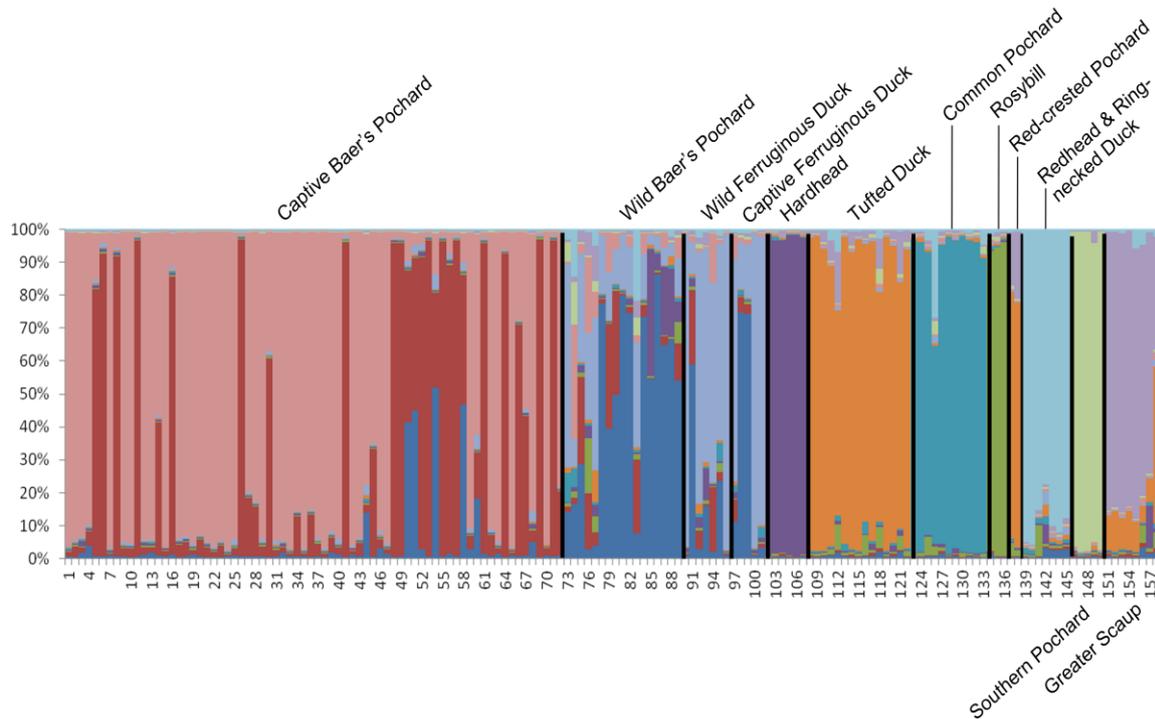


Figure 1. Structure analysis of microsatellites from *Aythya* and *Netta* ducks.

39. There was no evidence of hybridisation or significant inbreeding in the WWT captive stock, though there is less genetic diversity in these birds when compared to wild Baer's Pochard, indicating that genetic drift has occurred. Nevertheless, the WWT stock has been well-managed, especially considering the small number of founders and many generations in captivity, and provides a suitable source of founders for a conservation breeding programme.

Plans for 2017-18

- 40. A captive stock management plan will be produced for the WWT collection in early 2017.
- 41. Determine the genetic status of captive birds held in other collections.

6. AWARENESS AND POLICY

Activities since MoP8

- 42. A number of articles about Baer's Pochard have been published in *BirdingASIA*, including Hearn (2015), Heim (2016) and Lu *et al.* (2015).
- 43. In September 2016, Beijing Forestry University held a training course for staff from the Forestry System of Hubei Province. DING Changqing discussed the importance of Baer's Pochard conservation and the future actions with the vice-director of the Conservation Department of Hubei Forestry Bureau and the director of Wuhan Forestry Bureau.

44. An interview with the BPTF Global Coordinator was recorded in May 2016 for Talking Naturally, available as a podcast at <https://soundcloud.com/talkingnaturally/tn-027-baers-pochard-a-critically-endangered-east-asian-duck>
45. Leaflet distributed to Russian bird watchers and hunters (Figure 2).
46. Poster distributed by WWF to wetland site managers in Yangtze floodplain (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Leaflet distributed to Russian bird watchers and hunters (left) and poster distributed to wetland site managers in Yangtze floodplain (right).

47. In October 2015, 1,000 leaflets and brochures were distributed in Myanmar to hunting authorities responsible for control of waterfowl hunting during the wintering season, hunters, local villagers, birding guides, universities and nature lovers both within the areas close to survey sites (Aung *et al.* 2016) and elsewhere in Myanmar.
48. In 2016, China Wild Nature produced leaflets about Baer's Pochard and other waterbirds for distribution to local people living near to Hengshui Hu and for wider distribution in 'China Environmental Magazine', published by All-China Environment Federation and the Ministry of Environmental Protection (Figure 3).

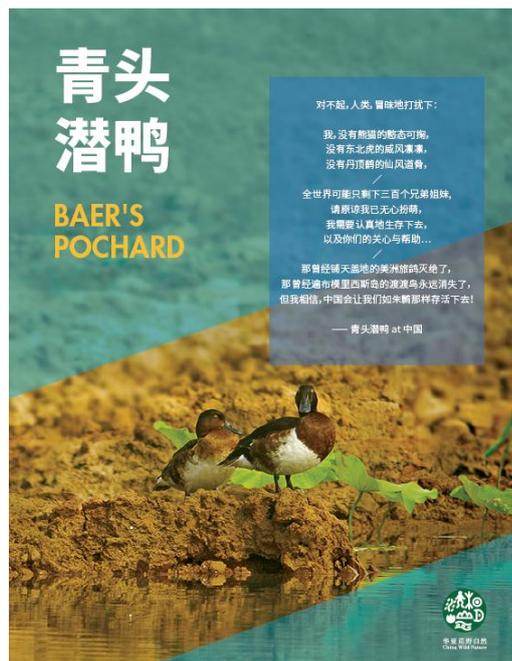


Figure 3. Advertisement by China Wild Nature placed in *China Environmental Magazine*, 2016.

49. Various other interested individuals have helped to raise awareness of Baer's Pochard and the need to search for them and report sightings among birdwatchers, particularly in China, to great effect. These include Terry TOWNSHEND (see <https://birdingbeijing.com/tag/baers-pochard/>), WU Lan (Beijing Forestry University) and LEI Jinyu (WWF China, Wuhan).
50. A Baer's Pochard Task Force Twitter account (@Baers_TaskForce) was set up in May 2016 and as of 31st October had 81 followers.

Plans for 2017-18

51. Ensure reserve managers, local and regional administrators and other relevant people at all sites supporting Baer's Pochard are aware of their presence and the need to conserve them.
52. Continue to alert bird watchers of the need to search for Baer's Pochard and report all details, including zero counts, particularly at potential breeding sites in China.
53. Publish up-to-date assessments of status.

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Appendix 1. Summary of progress against actions in the Baer's Pochard SSAP in 2015 and 2016.

Action	Priority and timescale	Progress in 2015 and 2016
Result 1: The impact of habitat loss and degradation is understood and significantly reduced.		
1. Assess the scale and causes of habitat loss and degradation in core parts of the range	High, complete by end 2016	No progress
2. Assess importance of spring grass burning in breeding range and implement appropriate management to minimise impact on Baer's Pochard	Medium, complete by end 2016	No progress
3. Develop and implement integrated landscape management strategies that minimise and mitigate for future loss of Baer's Pochard habitat	High, complete by end 2016	No progress
4. Identify sites throughout the flyway, but particularly in the breeding range, where habitat restoration and enhancement can be undertaken	High, complete by end 2016	A suite of suitable sites has been identified, but habitat restoration / enhancement has not yet been initiated
Result 2. The impact of harvesting of birds and eggs from the wild is understood and significantly reduced.		
5. Assess the scale, methods and drivers of current harvesting, particularly in China	High, complete by end 2015	No progress
6. Implement measures to significantly improve the enforcement of existing bird protection legislation, particularly in China	High, complete by end 2015	No progress
7. Establish an EAAFP Task Force on Harvesting of Wild Birds	High, complete by end 2015	Not completed, but other initiatives are addressing the harvesting issue; BPTF need to ensure Baer's Pochard is taken into account as these develop
Result 3. Knowledge of the ecological requirements of Baer's Pochard is significantly improved.		
8. Undertake detailed study of ecology at Hengshui Hu	High, initiate by summer 2016	Initial surveys of the population and breeding success have been initiated
9. If a suitable site can be located, undertake research to determine the ecological needs of non-breeding Baer's Pochard	High, initiate by winter 2016/17	No progress, though suitable sites for research are now known
Result 4. The understanding of population status, distribution, key sites and demography is significantly improved.		
10. Undertake surveys of potential breeding locations in N and NE China, particularly Xingkai Hu (Lake	High, complete by end 2016	Some surveys and interviews with reserve managers have been conducted but no sites supporting

Action	Priority and timescale	Progress in 2015 and 2016
Khanka)		breeding Baer's Pochard have been found in NE China. Some sites have been located in north-central China, between the Yangtze floodplain and Beijing.
11. Undertake surveys of potential breeding locations in Russia, particularly Lake Khanka and the Khasan wetlands	High, complete by end 2016	Some surveys have been undertaken, particularly around Muraviovka Park
12. Undertake surveys of potential breeding locations in the Rason region of DPRK	Medium, complete by end 2017	No progress
13. Develop and implement an annual monitoring programme in the breeding range	High, initiate by summer 2017	Initial surveys have been undertaken
14. Undertake, ideally annually, comprehensive counts at all known and former wintering locations	High, ongoing from January 2015	Gradual progress has been made, with an increasing number of sites surveyed each winter
15. Maintain a database of all records of Baer's Pochard (including sites with nil counts)	Medium, ongoing	Completed and ongoing
Result 5. A flyway-wide network of protected and well managed sites is established and maintained.		
16. Designate Hengshui Hu as a Ramsar site and develop and implement a site management plan focused on the needs of Baer's Pochard	High, complete by end 2015	No progress
17. Ensure that the Khasan wetlands are protected and managed for Baer's Pochard	High, complete by end 2015	No progress
18. Assess the current protection of and management at all sites supporting Baer's Pochard, and enhance where necessary	Medium, complete by end 2016	No progress
Result 6. A global management strategy for the captive population is developed and implemented.		
19. Determine the genetic status of all captive Baer's Pochard	High, ongoing, to be completed by end 2015	Study completed for the birds held by WWT
20. Develop a strategy for the management and conservation breeding of the global captive population, including the possibility of reintroduction	High, complete and ongoing by end 2015	No progress, but studbook keepers for EAZA and AZA have been appointed
Result 7. Awareness of Baer's Pochard and its conservation needs is significantly enhanced, particularly among decision-makers.		
21. Create an EAAFP Baer's Pochard Task Force	High, complete by end 2014	Completed
22. Promote status and conservation needs of Baer's Pochard among	High, ongoing	Gradual progress is being made

Action	Priority and timescale	Progress in 2015 and 2016
relevant governments and other decision-makers		
23. Promote the status and conservation needs of Baer's Pochard among the general public, particularly with respect to the prevention of hunting and consumption of wild ducks	High, ongoing	Some progress, though not yet related to hunting
Result 8. Appropriate policy for the international conservation of Baer's Pochard is in place.		
24. Include Baer's Pochard on the List of National Special Protected Animals of China (1st level)	High, complete by end 2015	No progress
25. Hold a Baer's Pochard SAP implementation workshop	High, complete by end May 2015	No progress
26. Hold annual Baer's Pochard SAP action planning workshops to review and update this Plan	Medium, annual from 2016 to 2019	No progress
27. Add Baer's Pochard to CITES Appendix I	Low, complete by end 2016	Not completed; discussion with CITES lead to conclusion that there was an insufficient international trade issue for this change to be justified