

## CONSERVATION PROJECT

# The Amur bird project at Muraviovka Park in Far East Russia

WIELAND HEIM &amp; SERGEI M. SMIRENSKI

Muraviovka Park is the only private nature reserve in Far East Russia and is situated on the middle part of the Amur river, at the south end of Zeya-Bureya plain 50 km south-east of the city of Blagoveshchensk. The place is well-known for it holds important breeding populations of Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*, Red-crowned *Grus japonensis* and White-naped Cranes *G. vipio* as well as a roosting site for large numbers of Hooded Cranes *G. monacha* and waterfowl (Rosenfeld & Smirenski 2002). In 1995 the park and its adjacent territories were added to the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. In contrast to the state-managed nature reserves, environmental education for local people plays an important role at Muraviovka Park. It is also a model for sustainable land use—probably the only one in Far East Russia.

During the last two years, autumn bird migration has been studied at Muraviovka Park, and at the end of February 2013 we started to observe spring migration for the first time. From

2011 to date over 9,000 birds of 100 species have been mist-netted and ringed, and there have been more than 2,000 re-traps (Heim *et al.* 2012, Heim *et al.* in prep.). The most numerous species ringed have been Black-faced Bunting *Emberiza spodocephala* (881), Long-tailed Tit *Aegithalos caudatus* (620), Pallas's Reed Bunting *Emberiza pallasi* (603), Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* (582), Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus* (558), Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* (542), Long-tailed Rosefinch *Uragus sibiricus* (491), Siberian Rubythroat *Luscinia calliope* (475), Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (426) and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* (417). We have collected data on phenology, biometrics, age and sex as well as habitat use; this has never been done before in the Amur region in a standardised way. Some species were recorded for the first time in the area, including Spotted Bush Warbler *Bradypterus thoracicus* and Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps*. Through our work, we confirmed the importance of the park for a variety of bird species

**Plate 1.** Muriovka Park at dusk, 1 October 2012.





**Plate 2.** Asian Stubtail *Urosphena squameiceps* caught and ringed on 9 September 2012. This was a first record for the region.



**Plate 3.** Male Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis* caught and ringed on 30 March 2013.

**Plate 4.** Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis* are breeding birds in Muraviovka Park, 13 April 2013.



as a safe roosting site. Many birds stay several days or even weeks to refuel, before continuing their journey over thousands of kilometres to their wintering grounds in South-East Asia or India.

Another important part of our work is environmental education. Nature conservation is only effective with the acceptance and support of the local people and we want them to appreciate the value of their natural surroundings. To encourage this, we invite classes of students and pupils to experience nature and to take part in our

work. During our studies over 1,000 children and students visited Muraviovka Park and our project, learning about bird migration, nature conservation and scientific methods. Many of them were impressed by the face-to-face contact with the small birds during the process of ringing. In August 2013 a summer school for local students about bird migration and nature conservation will take place. It is our aim to find and teach young scientists willing to continue our work at Muraviovka Park.



**Plate 5.** Environmental education is an important part of the Amur Bird Project, 16 September 2012.

During the forthcoming 2013 breeding season, we will collect data on status, abundance and potential threats to the breeding birds of the area, focusing on target species including Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, Band-bellied Crake *Porzana paykullii*, Menzbier's Pipit *Anthus (gustavi) menzbieri*, Manchurian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus tangorum* and Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* as well as the storks and cranes. Furthermore, we plan to search for Streaked Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus sorgophilus*—a singing male was observed at Muraviovka Park in 2004 (F. Pekus *in litt.*), which is the only known observation from this possible breeding area of this Vulnerable species (Kennerley & Pearson 2010, BirdLife International 2013). This part of the project is supported by a grant from the Oriental Bird Club. The collected data will be used to evaluate the success of the park and to create conservation strategies.

We are always searching for volunteers, willing to take part in our work. Current information is always available on our blog: [www.amurbirding.blogspot.com](http://www.amurbirding.blogspot.com).

#### Acknowledgements

We thank Svetlana Yakovenko and the staff of Muraviovka Park for arranging our stay and all volunteers who have taken part in the project so far: Friedrich Eidam, Franziska Maier, Andreas Siegmund, Maria Feustel, Birthe Boergmann, Charlotte Hopfe, Naomi Huig and Juliana Nefjodowa. We also thank the Oriental Bird Club, Förderkreis Allgemeine Biologie e.V., ProRing e.V., Naturschutzbund e.V. and Muraviovka Park as well as all private donors for financial support, and A.


A. Averin and V. V. Pronkevich of the Moscow Ringing Centre for providing rings.

#### References

- BirdLife International (2013) Species fact sheet: *Acrocephalus sorgophilus*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 28/01/2013
- Heim, W., Smirenski, S. M., Siegmund, A. & Eidam, F. (2012) Results of an autumnal bird ringing project at Muraviovka Park/Amur region in 2011. *Avian Ecology and Behaviour* 21: 27–40.
- Heim, W., Eidam, F., Maier, F., Feustel, M. & Smirenski, S. M. (in prep.) Results of the Amur Bird Project at Muraviovka Park in autumn 2012.
- Kennerley, P. & Pearson, D. (2010) *Reed and bush warblers*. London: Christopher Helm.
- Rosenfeld, S. B. & Smirenski, S. M. (2002) A joint project of the Working Group on Geese and Muraviovka Nature Park on inventory of spring stopovers of geese in the Amur Region and development of recommendations on their protection. *Newsletter of the Working Group on Geese of Northern Eurasia 'Kazarka'* 7: 413–420. (In Russian).

Wieland HEIM  
Paracelsusstraße 7  
09114 Chemnitz, Germany  
Email: [wieland.heim@gmx.de](mailto:wieland.heim@gmx.de)

Sergei M. SMIRENSKI  
Muraviovka Park, Glavpochtamt  
P.O. Box 16, Blagoveshchensk, 675000  
Amur Region, Russian Federation



**VIETNAM  
BIRDING**

*The highest number of endemics  
in mainland South-East Asia!*

Individually-tailored custom birding tours and  
escorted small group birding tours from  
the Vietnam specialist.

Combined birding and cultural tours to Vietnam  
and extensions to Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

Contact Richard Craik  
E-mail: [richard@vietnambirding.com](mailto:richard@vietnambirding.com)  
Website: [www.vietnambirding.com](http://www.vietnambirding.com)