

DOI 10.21857/ygjwrce15y

Received: 23.11.2024.

Accepted: 20.12.2024.

## SPECIMENS OF THE GLOBALLY EXTINCT SLENDER-BILLED CURLEW *Numenius tenuirostris* IN THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY IN SOFIA

*Primjerci globalno izumrlog tankokljunog pozviždača Numenius tenuirostris u zbirci Nacionalnog prirodoslovnog muzeja u Sofiji*

ZLATOZAR N. BOEV

National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,  
1 Blvd. Tsar Osvoboditel, 1000 Sofia, Bulgaria

### ABSTRACT

The earliest record of the Slender-billed Curlew in Bulgaria dates back to 1682-1683. In the past, the species was observed during seasonal migrations, in summer, and in winter. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all observations were from four locations along the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast. The National Museum of Natural History in Sofia holds six stuffed dry-mounted preparations of specimens of adult birds: four from Bulgaria and two from European Turkey. Five of them were collected in the last decades of the 19th century, and one in the second decade of the 20th century.

### The Slender-billed Curlew in the world

The Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* is a species of very large non-breeding range. It has most recently been assessed for The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species in 2018. The species is listed as Critically Endangered under criteria C2a(i,ii);D (BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL 2018). Until the last decade of the 20th century, information and forecasts about the survival of the species were extremely contradictory. For example, NANKINOV (1998) expressed an optimistic forecast for the reliable stabilization of the species' population on a global scale. However, there are no known reliable sightings of the species after 2001 (DEL HOYO 2020). Nevertheless, it was declared globally extinct in November 2024 (BUCHANAN *et al.* 2024). For decades, the slender-billed curlew was considered the

\*Corresponding author: e-mail: boev@nmnhs.com; zlatozarboev@gmail.com

most endangered and least known bird species in the Western Palearctic (IANKOV 2002, KIRWAN *et al.* 2015).

Given the species' conservation status, specimens held in museum collections around the world have gained great interest. Detailed information has already been published on some of them (MLÍKOVSKÝ 2004). The present short note has the same aim.

### **The Slender-billed Curlew in Bulgaria**

The earliest observation of the species in Bulgaria dates back to 1682 – 1683. It is supposed to have nested by the lakes of Dobrudzha (at present in Rumania and Bulgaria) and of Greece (NANKINOV 1991). In the 20th century, the species was observed in Bulgaria only in four sites – Pomoriysko Lake, Mandra-Poda Lake Complex, Atanasovsko Lake and Chengene Skele Bay. The four localities are situated along the southern Bulgarian Black Sea coast in the Burgas wetlands (NANKINOV & MINTCHEV 1996, KOSTADINOVA & GRAMATIKOV 2007). In the country, the Slender-billed Curlew was a migratory, wintering, and summering bird. Its seasonal migrations occurred in March – May and August – October. After NANKINOV *et al.* (2007) in the past, the species was considerably frequent and abundant. Small flocks have been seen in Dobrudzha (Shabla Lake and Durankulak Lake) and East Bulgaria during the migration and in summer (IANKOV 2009). Some records are known along the valleys of the rivers Maritsa and Iskar, in flocks of several dozens. There are many observations in the vicinity of Sofia. Until the 1990s the species had been recorded along the Black Sea coast. It migrated in separate flocks, singly or in flocks together with the Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*.

### **The Slender-billed Curlew in the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia**

The ornithological collection in the Vertebrate Animals Department of the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia (NMNHS) houses the stuffed dry-mounted preparations of six specimens of Slender-billed Curlew (BOEV 2003). All of them are of historical value. Most of the birds were collected in the last decade of the 19th century. Only one was obtained in the 20th century (in 1914). They originate from the modern territory of Bulgaria and Turkey (European part). Two of the preparations were prepared by the team of the French diplomat, ornithologist, and naturalist Count Amedée Alléon (1838-1904), subsequently purchased by the Bulgarian Tsar Ferdinand I (BOEV 2024). The remaining four specimens were shot in Bulgaria. Three of them originate from the vicinity of the city of Sofia. Below are given the full data from the labels of these specimens:

#### **I. Specimens from Bulgaria:**

1. NMNHS 406 ♀ ad, 31 March 1914, Sofia City;
2. NMNHS 407 ♂ ad., 24 March 1899, Mramor village [11 km N of Sofia City];

3. NMNHS 2772 ♂ ad., 28 March 1890, Kumanitsa village [present Kubratovo village; 9 km N of Sofia City];
4. NMNHS 2774 ♂ ad., received on 26 March 1899 from an unknown locality in Bulgaria.

II. Specimens from European Turkey:

5. NMNHS 408 ♀ ad., December 1892, Constantinople [present Istanbul] (Turkey), coll. A. Alléon;
6. NMNHS 2773 ♀ ad., 11 September 1895, Makrikoy village (10 km WSW of C Istanbul, Turkey), coll. A. Alléon (Fig. 1)

As can be seen, all of these specimens were taken during the non-breeding season: four of them were shot in the last ten days of March, one was taken during the autumn migration, and the other in the winter (December).

The Slender-billed Curlew is the second (after the Carolina Parakeet *Conuropsis carolinensis*) globally extinct species represented in the ornithological collection of the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia.



**Figure 1.** An adult female specimen of the Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris*. Collection of the NMNHS, No 2773. Photo: Georgi Tsonev.

**Slika 1.** Primjerak odrasle ženke tankokljunog pozviždača *Numenius tenuirostris*. Zbirka NMNHS, br. 2773. Fotografija: Georgi Tsonev.

## References

- BIRDLIFE INTERNATIONAL (2018): *Numenius tenuirostris*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2018: e.T22693185A131111201. <https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2018-2.RLTS.T22693185A131111201.en>. (Accessed on 22 November 2024.)
- BOEV, Z. (2003): Specimens of extinct and threatened birds in the collections of the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia, Bulgaria. In: COLLAR, N., FISHER, C., FEARE, CH (Eds.). Why Museums Matter; Avian Archives in Age of Extinction. - Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club. 123A – Suppl. 2003: 234-245.
- BOEV, Z. (2024): One Hundred and Thirty-Five Years of Ornithology in Bulgaria: The Role of the National Museum of Natural History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in the Development of Ornithology in Bulgaria—Representatives, Collections and Achievements. Diversity 2024, 16, 284. <https://doi.org/10.3390/d16050284>
- BUCHANAN, G. M., CHAPPLE, B., BERRYMAN, A.J., CROCKFORD, N., JANSEN, J. J. F. J., BOND, A. (2024): Global extinction of Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*). Ibis: 1-14. doi:10.1111/ibi.13368. ISSN 0019-1019.
- DEL HOYO, J. (ed.) (2020): All the Birds of the World. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona., 1-967.
- IANKOV P. 2002. National Action Plan for the Conservation of the Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*) in Bulgaria, 2002-2006. In: IANKOV P. (Chief Ed.). Globally Endangered Bird Species in Bulgaria. National Action Plans for their protection, Part 1. BSPB-MOEWS, Nature Conservation Series, Book 4, Sofia, BSPB: 204-219. (in Bulgarian).
- IANKOV, P. (2009): The farewell scream of the Slender-billed Curlew. Za ptitsite, 1: 12-14. (in Bulgarian).
- KIRWAN, G., PORTER, R., SCOTT, D. (2015): Chronicle of an extinction? A review of Slender-billed Curlew records in the Middle East. British Birds, 108: 669-682.
- KOSTADINOVA, I., GRAMATIKOV, M. (eds.) (2007): Important Bird Areas in Bulgaria and Natura 2000. Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds, Conservation Series, Book 11. Sofia, BSPB, 639 p.
- MLÍKOVSKÝ, J. (2004): Remarks on some records of the Slender-billed Curlew (*Numenius tenuirostris*). Sylvia, 40: 125-130.
- NANKINOV, D. (1991): Sightings of Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* Vieillot, 1817) in the Balkan countries. Wader Study Group Bulletin, 62: 24-32.
- NANKINOV, D. (1998): The population of the slender-billed curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* becomes steady. Monitoring researches are necessary. Russian Ornithological Journal, 56: 12-15. ISSN 0869-4362
- NANKINOV, D., MINTCHEV, N. (1996): Dünnschnabel-Brachvogel (*Numenius tenuirostris*) in Bulgarien. Ornithologische Mitteilungen, 48 (12): 317.
- NANKINOV, D., SIMEONOV, S., MIČEV, T., IVANOV, B. (1997): The fauna of Bulgaria. Vol. 26. Aves. Part II. Academic Publishing House Prof. Marin Drinov & Pensoft Publishing House, Sofia, 428 p. (in Bulgarian, English summary).

## SAŽETAK

Najraniji zapis o tankokljunom pozviždaču *Numenius tenuirostris* u Bugarskoj datira iz 1682. – 1683. U prošlosti je bio prisutan tijekom selidbe, ljeti i zimi. U 20. stoljeću sva su promatranja bila s četiri lokacije duž južne bugarske crnomorske obale. Nacionalni prirodoslovni muzej u Sofiji čuva ukupno šest suho montiranih preparata primjeraka odraslih ptica: četiri iz Bugarske i dva iz europskog dijela Turske. Pet ih je prikupljeno u posljednjim desetljećima 19. stoljeća, a jedan u drugom desetljeću 20. stoljeća.