

This letter is sent by email only

Mr Yokoyama Hideyuki Mayor of Osaka City
Mr Yoshimura Hirofumi, Governor of Osaka Prefecture



29 May 2025

Dear Osaka Governor, Mr Yoshimura Hirofumi and Osaka Mayor, Mr Yokoyama Hideyuki

We write to you concerning the potential of Expo 2025 to showcase a Nature Positive response to development, in relation to coastal wetland conservation.

Co-signatories of this letter include the Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The RSPB is Europe's largest biodiversity conservation charity with 1.2 million members and is the UK Partner of BirdLife International. Similarly the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) is the BirdLife Partner for Japan. Koich ENDO, Chairman of the Board of WBSJ is co-signatory of this letter together with four other Japanese nature conservation NGOs.

Like Japan, UK is an island nation, so understands the importance of coastal ecosystems to people as well as to migratory birds and other biodiversity. Of the RSPB's 222 nature reserves in the UK, covering 159,000 hectares, 84 are coastal, covering more than 41,000 hectares. This includes Europe's biggest coastal wetland restoration project at Wallasea Island in the Greater Thames Estuary.

Besides the RSPB's work across the UK, we work with and through our BirdLife International partners globally where we can make a material difference. For the past 15 years, among our global species recovery priorities has been helping to prevent the extinction of the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. Less than 800 individuals remain of this iconic small wading bird. Osaka Bay has been a regular stopover on its annual migrations along the East Asian Australasian Flyway, between breeding areas in north east Russia and wintering grounds in south east Asia.

The Spoon-billed Sandpiper is a key flagship species for the millions of other coastal waterbirds that use the East Asian Australasian Flyway. Many of these are threatened, primarily due to loss of coastal wetlands along the flyway.

Yumeshima was one of the top five sites for Spoon-billed Sandpipers in Japan. However, since most of the coastal wetland habitat has been lost to the development of the Expo 2025 site, there have been no records.

We note the Expo 2025 goal "To contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)". Does this present an opportunity to turn the current nature negative Expo 2025 development, into a Nature Positive initiative? This could be through mitigating and compensating the terrible loss in past decades of Osaka Bay's coastal wetlands by:

- managing the remaining pools at Yumeshima for migratory waterbirds and
- undertaking other coastal wetland protection, management, restoration and creation work in Osaka Bay, including to provide adaption to rising sea levels and more extreme climate change related impacts, as well as benefits to local communities of people.

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The RSPB is part of BirdLife International, a network of passionate organisations, working together to save nature across the world.

Patron: His Majesty The King **President:** Dr Amir Khan **Chief Executive:** Beccy Speight

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It would be wonderful to be able to announce such an initiative, at some point during the Expo. Perhaps this could coincide with confirmation of the future of the Yumeshima site? Please see attached briefing for more specific suggestions in this regard, including recommendations from the RSPB's Coastal Advisor, Jeff Kew, expert in managing large scale coastal restoration projects, including the Wallasea Island restoration mentioned above, recently visited Osaka Bay together with British Consul General, Michael Blyth and local NGOs.

If there is interest in this initiative, we would like to propose a meeting to discuss the proposals with the Mayor or Governor, as well as the members of the relevant departments. This could involve exchanging some of the UK's world-leading expertise on conservation and restoration of coastal ecosystems. Our hope would be that Osaka Bay, including Yumeshima, can become a demonstration site for this approach.

We have discussed with Michael Blyth and Carolyn Davidson, Commissioner General for the UK at Expo, the possibility of the Consulate facilitating such an exchange. This could build on the successful *Joint Seminar on Marine Biodiversity Preservation for UK-Korea Cooperation on Countering Climate Change* hosted by the British Embassy in Seoul last September, with RSPB involvement¹.

We, the RSPB and Japanese NGO cosignatories of this letter, very much hope that you will look positively on our request and look forward to the opportunity to discuss collaboration further with you.

Yours sincerely

Beccy SPEIGHT
Chief Executive Officer
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

Koich ENDO
Chair of the Board
Wild Bird Society of Japan

Toshiyuki TSUCHIYA
Chairman of the Board
The Nature Conservation Society of Japan

Takejiro SUEYOSHI
Chairperson
World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) Japan

Yoshihiro NATUHARA
Chairman
Nature Conservation Society of Osaka

¹ The seminar included three Republic of Korea talks, three UK talks on Importance and Protection of the Marine Environment, World Heritage Nomination (England East Coast Flyway) and Blue Carbon; more than 60 participants from a range of organisations. RSPB engagement was in the framework of their Memorandum of Understanding with the Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries. They support the East Coast Flyway (Humber to Thames) World Heritage nomination, RSPB help them build capacity on coastal wetland management and restoration etc.

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Kentaro TAKAGI
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Cc Yoshitaka Ito, Minister for the World Expo 2025
Cabinet regarding Expo 2025 (naikakukanbou.expo2025.w2x@cas.go.jp)
Michael Blyth, HM Consul General Osaka
Ms Carolyn Davidson, Commissioner General for UK at Expo 2025
Joe Young, Global Challenges Counsellor, British Embassy, Tokyo

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