

## **Report of the PSG Conservation Small-Grants Program**

**PROJECT TITLE:** Conservation of the Critically Endangered Chinese Crested Tern: Restoration of a Lost Breeding Colony

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### **(1) Project objectives:**

The Chinese Crested Tern (CCT, *Thalasseus bernsteini*) is likely the most threatened seabird species in the world. Since the rediscovery of CCTs in 2000, the species has only been found nesting in large colonies of Greater Crested Terns (GCTs, *T. bergii*). Monitoring mixed colonies of CCTs and GCTs has identified challenges for conservation of critically endangered CCTs, including egg harvest, human disturbance and breeding failure. Consequently, we conducted a project in Jiushan Islands off Eastern China coast in 2013 and 2014 to restore a large breeding colony of GCTs in the hopes that CCTs would subsequently recruit to the colony. We used techniques of social attraction (tern decoys and audio playbacks) and colony monitoring that have been successfully applied in seabird restoration projects worldwide, and aimed to provide suitable, protected, and well-monitored breeding habitat for CCTs in the Jiushan Islands, and constitute a major step toward bringing this critically endangered species back from the brink of extinction.

### **(2) Proposed and actual activities:**

- i) Prepare site for social attraction of Chinese Crested Terns, including implementing vegetation or other habitat management as needed to optimize nesting habitat for Chinese Crested Terns, installing 400 decoys and audio 3 playback systems across the colony restoration site, and installing observation blind for monitoring the colony site.
- ii) Monitor and protect the colony restoration site during the Chinese Crested Tern

breeding season.

- iii) Continue outreach to local government officials and the general public to increase public awareness, acceptance, and support of Chinese Crested Tern restoration objectives.

### **(3) Evaluation of the effectiveness of the actions:**

The restoration project of Chinese Crested Terns at the Jiushan Islands has had a second and even more successful year: at least 43 Chinese Crested Terns and 4000 Greater Crested terns arrived and stayed on the island of Tiedun Dao this breeding season (from mid-May to late-August 2014), and at least 20 breeding pairs of CCT formed. In early August no less than 13 young Chinese Crested Terns fledged. For a species with a previously known global population of not more than 30 birds (estimated global population not more than 50 individuals), this is a remarkable, almost miraculous, success.



Project team before the field camp





The project site before the tern colony arriving



Breeding colony





Monitoring blind and project site



The Chinese Crested Terns and their chick

The evaluation of the effectiveness also refer to news releases of *A big comeback for Chinese Crested Terns in the Jiushan Islands, China* at official websites of Birdlife International:

<http://www.birdlife.org/asia/news/big-comeback-chinese-crested-terns-jiushan-islands-china>,

and National Audubon:

<http://projectpuffin.audubon.org/big-comeback-chinese-crested-terns-jiushan-islands-china>.

#### **(4) A comparison of proposed and actual expenditures of money/use of donated materials:**

A total of \$4,000 was proposed to purchase a camping shelter (\$3,495 ) and related camping equipment (\$505) that are essential to allow colony monitors to live on the restoration island.

Finally we get a reward of \$2,000. The actual expenditures included: i) \$1,289 for a Honda 20i portable generator which is necessary for providing power other than solar systems, ii) \$ 466 for the camping equipment, and iii) \$245 for food for the monitors.

#### **(5) Suggestions for further work or improvements to the completed project design:**

The project will continue in 2015. Besides social attraction and colony monitoring, we plan to band the birds in attempt to understand their migration and dispersal.