

Report on information exchange on migratory birds within the MOU activities between the Trilateral Cooperation and Korea on October 12-15, 2010

The Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Land, Transport and Maritime Affairs of the Republic of Korea (MLTM) and the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea includes to establish and expand a network of experts, authorities and NGOs for experience exchange, to share knowledge and experiences of monitoring, research, conservation, restoration and sustainable use of tidal flats, to hold educational and academic workshops and to invite representatives to workshops and conferences. Within this MOU three priority fields of interest are specified: 1) macro-benthos of tidal flats, 2) environmental education and 3) migratory birds.

In the framework of the MOU Mr Marc van Roomen (SOVON, Dutch Centre for Field Ornithology, The Netherlands) and Mr Gerold Lürßen, (Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, CWSS) were invited by KOEM (for MLTM) and the Korea National Park Service for a 3 day field- and workshop trip on October 12-14 along the Korean West coast and the following International Symposium on Migratory Birds in Mopko on October 15, 2010. Eight other migratory bird experts from all over the world participated as well together with several Korean government and NGO representatives. Press and TV attended the travel and interviewed the participants. Aim of the travel to Korea was to intensify the cooperation between several migratory birds monitoring and management related Korean organizations and the Trilateral Cooperation, especially the Trilateral Joint Monitoring Migratory Bird program (JMMB). Both participants got extensive information on the ecological status, the management and the ongoing developments of the tidal flats at specific sites along the Korean West coast with main focus on migratory birds. During the fieldtrip a presentation on monitoring methods within the JMMB was given. At the symposium both participants gave a presentation on results of migratory bird monitoring for policy and management in the Wadden Sea and a presentation on Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) in the Wadden Sea.

Field trip

October 12, 2010.

The three day field trip was organized by KOEM and additionally supported by the Korea National Park Research Institute and started in the city of Songdo near Incheon. Songdo is a former extensive tidal flat area, which is now largely reclaimed with a lot of infrastructure development. At the first stop in Gunsan, at the estuary of Geum, the participants visited the local department of the Korean Marine Environmental Management cooperation (KOEM). KNPS and KOEM gave a general introduction and a preliminary discussion of the field trip to the island of Yubu-do. Yubu-do is one of the few remaining important high-tide roosts for waterbirds using the Geum estuary. Environmental and ecological problems at this estuary are the ongoing development of the surroundings by which the tidal flats are positioned and squeezed within a sea of urban development and concrete walls. Because of changes in waterbird community it is suspected that the substrate of the outer Geum estuary is changing as a result of the closing of the Saemangum wall positioned south of Geum estuary. Finally, despite plans

for better protection of Yubu-island, taking measures is difficult because local owners of land want to keep all options open, preferably for selling their property for project development. A boat tour to Yubu-do, bird watching and experience exchange with Korean bird watchers at the northern part of the island followed. Information exchange about monitoring methods of this site and reasons on decreasing bird numbers were exchanged. During high water (17.40), large numbers of Oystercatchers, Eastern Curlews, Grey Plovers, Dunlins and Kentisch Plovers were present. More special were the 2 Spoon-billed Sandpipers, 2 Spotted Greenshanks and several Broad-billed Sandpipers. In the evening a presentation by Marc was given about the methodological methods of the JMMB program, which was attended by participants of the Korean NGO's and government officials. After that a lively discussion about present monitoring in Korea was held.

October 13, 2010.

The day started with a bus trip to Saemangum with visiting different sites along the former estuaries of the rivers Dongjin-gang and Man-gyeonggang. The Korean participants informed about land history and land reclamation of Saemangum. The area lost the original tidal range of around 7m to presently only 1m in 2008. The embankment caused severe damages to the very valuable ecology of the tidal flats and resulted in major declines of characteristic bird species and the collapse of the local fisheries. As an essential critical network site in the Australian-East Asian flyway the embankment seriously threatens several bird species like Great Knot and Spoon-billed Sandpiper. The excursion was completed with watching and counting of waterbirds still present. The present area still contains large numbers of waterbirds (although of different origin), however we were informed that this will change quickly because of implementation of the further development plans (city building, golf course, industry). A short round of interviews with press and TV on the status of Saemangum finished the excursion. Korean and Australian participants mentioned the former occurrence of a population of 50.000 Great Knot at this site, which have now disappeared here and have not reappeared at other sites in Korea or elsewhere.

October 14, 2010.

An early morning trip to Aphaedo Island near Mokpo gave an example of the awkward situation of migratory birds when either feeding or roosting sites are disturbed by human activities. The area showed small pieces of remaining habitat however with both pressures on the roosting and feeding habitat and no proper connectivity between these two functions.

A bus trip to the island of Jeungdo followed in the afternoon. Jeungdo is characterized by a sustainable use of resources like the salt production and sustainable tourism. Part of Jeungdo is participating in the 'Slow Movement' (Cityslow), which tries to improve life quality by thoughtfully use of local resources. This area showed nice examples of undisturbed mudflats with abundant macrobenthos (crustacea and mudskippers). For waterbirds these sites seemed less important.

The evening was closed by a formal dinner hosted by National Park Research Institute and Shinan County with participation of regional and local representatives of Shinan County.

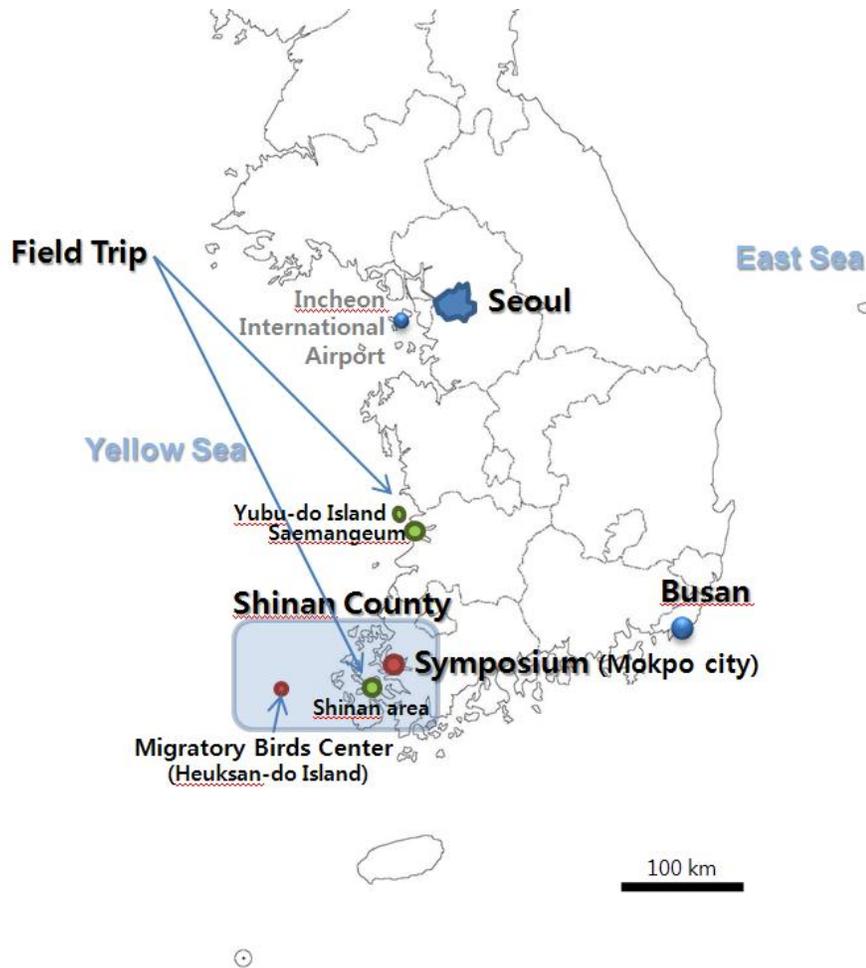


Figure 1: Locations of field trip and symposium in South Korea

October 15, 2010. International Symposium on Migratory Birds 2010

The Symposium was hosted by the National Park Research Institute and Shinan County under the auspices of Korean Ministry of Environment.

The purpose of the conference was to enable participants to share current knowledge on stopover ecology of migratory birds and conservation of stopover sites, and to make opportunities for communication with foreign researchers. Thematic sessions explored topics such as the stopover characteristics of passerines and shorebirds, and conservation efforts such as recent research techniques, international networks, education, and habitat management.

Mr Marc von Roomen gave a presentation on '*The Joint Monitoring of Migratory Birds in the Wadden Sea: a project delivering results for conservation and management of waterbirds*'. Mr Gerold Lürßen presented '*Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) activities for migratory bird conservation in the Wadden Sea*'. Both presentations were published in the symposium proceedings.

In a closed meeting of representatives of Korean organizations involved in migratory bird monitoring (KOEM, Shinan County, Korea Shorebird Network, Getbol Forum) and the delegates of the Wadden Sea discussed the further cooperation on migratory bird monitoring and management in Korea and within the framework of the MOU.

The present migratory bird monitoring in Korea is separated in several organizations on private/NGO and governmental level. A joint migratory monitoring program, which works successfully since nearly 20 years in the Wadden Sea, is not available in Korea yet.

Therefore, it was strongly suggested that within the Korean context, a central Korean institution as coordinating body for waterbird monitoring on Korean tidal areas was needed. When such a central coordinating body is present this should also be the focal point or coordinating body for further cooperation into the field of migratory bird monitoring between Korea and the Trilateral Wadden Sea within the MOU. This institution should start with building up an organizational structure by inviting other Korean organizations to join and then to develop a joint monitoring program. For building the organizational structure only the Korean organizations are responsible. For the development of a joint migratory birds monitoring program within Korea, the trilateral cooperation can give support and advice in the future when needed.

The meeting proposed that the 'Shorebird Network', installed by Shinan County and with Mr Kyoung-gyu Lee as its secretary, should take initiative to become the coordinating body. In this process Mr Lee will consult the supervisory board of 'Shorebird Network' until the beginning of November 2010 to get endorsement. Ms Namue Lee from the Korea Marine Environment Management Corporation (KOEM), which is an executive body of the Ministry of MLTM, will ask MLTM for financial support for this development, she will do this before the beginning of November. Ms Lee will keep the Wadden Sea Cooperation informed about progress made. As potential partners within the joint organizational structure NGOs (Getbol Forum, Birds Korea, Ornithological Society of Korea and others) and governmental organizations (Shinan County, KOEM, MOE) were proposed. In view of the Korean situation it is expected that the consolidation process will take a long time. However all participants of the meeting confirmed that the conclusions of the meeting were the right ones and should be implemented in the future.

Conclusions and recommendations

- When traveling along the West coast of Korea and visiting several estuaries, it is unavoidable to become very pessimistic about the present status of remaining estuaries and tidal flats. Major developments in terms of embankments, economic activities and building infrastructure is the rule and there are very few examples of areas untouched or without major pressures, if any. The concept of complete tidal ecosystems which need careful management, including both attentions for economic activities and safeguarding natural values seem to have a very small basis. In this respect careful consideration need to be paid to the possible influence the MOU can have to change present decision processes negatively influencing the present state of tidal areas in Korea. At present some major developments in Song-do and Seamangum are continuing with adverse and irreversible influences on ecosystem services and local livelihoods. For many other areas this seems the same story. See the Blueprint (2010) at www.birdskorea.or.kr for an overview of past, present and future habitat loss and degradation.
- Besides influencing more environmental and ecological friendly policies it is maybe a good idea to promote also the idea of creating (private) nature reserves and the concept of restoration of nature values to change the present situation.
- Although at present only small steps are taken in the creation of a network for waterbird monitoring within Korea it is hoped that the decisions taken on the meeting on October 15 will be the start of such cooperation and will grow from there. When this cooperation has a firm basis it is worthwhile and fruitful to look for further possibilities in exchanges of knowledge between JMMB and Korea, resulting in capacity building in monitoring, research and management. This from the rationale that future conservation and management of tidal flats needs and will benefit from proper facts about natural values present.