

Our Work in 2023

“In the service of democracy,
peace and development”

A Peak Into HSF's Environmental Work

Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF) Korea supports the process of reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula. In the Republic of Korea (South Korea), this includes regional development, with a special focus on the border region (DMZ). In the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea), HSF attempts to contribute to peaceful development in the region through activities aiming for international integration and cooperation in the field of environment.

Publication of Several Research Papers

In February, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger and Dr. Hyunah Choi from HSF Korea worked on several new research papers and articles. Those published include an article on the Green Détente, a new research paper on the Black-faced Spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), and a MIDAS article on the 140th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Germany and Korea and the question: “Upgrade or Slow Decline of the Partnership?”

Visit of Siam Wetland and Aegibong Peace Eco Park

On February 8, HSF Korea visited the Siam Wetland as well as the Aegibong Peace Park in the Gimpo region together with Hans-Christian Winkler, a diplomat of the German Embassy Seoul, and Thomas Hahn, correspondent of *Süddeutsche Zeitung* for Japan and Korea. The wetland is a habitat for numerous bird species. Ongoing industrialization and urban development increasingly lead to more agricultural land being repurposed, which threatens the habitat of amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, and bird species.

However, on the inter-Korean border, many species have found refuge, because economic development is restricted there for military reasons. The conservation and preservation of wetlands on the Korean peninsula forms an important field of work for HSF Korea and involves areas on both the North Korean and South Korean sides.



The need for transboundary conservation is particularly evident in migratory bird flyways across the inter-Korean border, which is essential for biodiversity conservation on the Korean peninsula. The Aegibong Peace Eco Park uniquely illustrates this issue, as its observatory offers a direct view of the North Korean mainland, which is separated from South Korea by only a few hundred meters from the Jogang River. The excursion allowed participants to experience the effects of heavily industrialized agricultural policies through the Siam Wetlands.

MOP11: EAAFlyway Partnership

From March 12 until 17, the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership's (EAAFP) 11th Meeting of Partners (MOP11) took place under the theme – “We are all part of the East Asian-Australian Flyway from today”. The HSF Korea delegation led by Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger and his colleague Dr. Hyunah Choi, participated in MOP11 as a partner to discuss cooperation for protecting migratory bird habitats and the implementation of related actions. HSF Korea provided information material at a booth and organized side events with partners.



In the last twenty years, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS) brought together governments and civil society to discuss the protection of migratory species, including waterbirds and land birds in the Central Asian Flyway.

Visit of “Tiritiri Matangi and Aorangi Highland” – NZ

After the EAAFP MOP11, the EAAFP Secretariat and the HSF Korea delegation visited Tiritiri Matangi Island and Aorangi Highland in New Zealand to learn about wildlife management, including bird habitats. Even though this site's ecological and geographical characteristics are different from the Korean Peninsula, the delegation learned about wildlife conservation and management direction. Especially, they also discussed the habitat characters with volunteer guides in Tiritiri Matangi Island and Aorangi Highland. During this study tour, the delegation observed over 30 species, such as South Island Takahe, North Island Saddleback, North Island Robin, and New Zealand Fantail.



HSF Korea Birds Survey along the Han River Estuary

Since 2018 HSF Korea regularly surveys birds and their habitat status along the Han River Estuary, including the Siam-ri wetland, the Jogang-ri wetland, and Yu-do (islet). On March 27, Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, conducted a joint survey together with Eunjeong Lee, Eunjeong Kim, and Insook Jeon from EcoKorea along the Han River Estuary. They observed over 40 species, including around 106 Sawn Geese at the Jogang-ri wetland area, 1,233 Grest Cormorants at Yu-do, 2 Black-faced Spoonbills around Yu-do, and 2 Black-faced Spoonbills in the rice paddy area of the North Korean area seen from the Aigebong Peace Park.

Field Visit with Baden-Württemberg State Parliament Delegation

On May 18, HSF Korea and Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS) organized a field visit with the delegation of the state parliament of Baden-Württemberg to the Janghang wetland as well as the Aegibong Ecopark in Gimpo. The visit allowed participants to learn about the specifics of the wetland. They also discussed the importance of implementing sustainable growth strategies with Goyang city officials. At the Aegibong Ecopark the participants experienced the uniqueness of nature in the inner-Korean border region. The park's observatory, located directly at the Han River and the inter-Korean border, offers both a direct view of North Korea and an insight into the biodiversity of a non-industrialized area.



Publication: Research Paper with Korea University

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, resident representative of HSF Korea, and Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, published a research paper together with Prof. Woo-Kyun Lee from Korea University, who works with HSF Korea in the field of environment. The paper is titled: “Ecological Cooperation beyond the DMZ on the Korean Peninsula: Birds Know No Man-made Borders” and was published in the summer issue of the Korea Journal.

Expert Group Meeting in Kathmandu

From July 12 to July 13, the Expert Group Meeting of the Middle Latitude Region (MLR) and Third Pole counties, including Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, Kazakhstan, and Korea, took place at Kathmandu University. During the two-day meeting, current urgent challenges and the possibility of securing socio-ecological resilience through science-based adaptation and mitigation interventions in the MRL and Third Pole counties were discussed. HSF Korea and the OJERI-OJong Resilience Institute, organized a meeting with the MLR Network at Kathmandu University. Dr. Hyunah Choi, HSF Korea, participated in this meeting and shared information on HSF's work and ideas for future cooperation.



Conservation of Geese in North Korea

On August 17, Prof. Dr. Bernhard Seliger, shared some observations on the status and conservation of Geese in North Korea during the East Asia and Australian session of the 20th Goose Specialist Group meeting. He presented the North Korea survey results since 2014 and suggested further conservation activities.



The 15th Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting in Tongyeong City

From September 14 to 16, delegations from HSF Mongolia, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, and Korea met to discuss cooperation toward a common future via Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The Meeting was held in a hybrid format at the Sejahtera Forest in Tongyeong, South Korea. The theme of the meeting was "Empowering Sustainable Community through Education for Sustainable Development". The Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD (RCEs) is a network of existing formal, non-formal, and informal organizations that facilitate learning toward sustainable development in local and regional communities. The HSF delegations met with 130 experts from 33 RCEs of 14 countries and experienced the implementation of ESD at a local school and community.



Conference on the Changes in Environmental Law in the two Koreas

On September 15, the conference on the changes in environmental law in two Koreas and its implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) took place. The invited experts discussed how the two Korea achieved the SDGs - especially the environmental changes related to the SDGs 3, 6, 13, 14, 15, and 16. Dr Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, also participated in this conference and discussed environmental policy changes on the Korean Peninsula.

2023 World Coastal Forum in Yangcheng, China

From September 25 to 27, the World Coastal Forum (WCF) took place in Yangcheng, China, under the theme of harmony between people and nature. Various Multi-stakeholders participated in this forum to foster harmony and coastal region protection. Mr. Wang Guanghua, China's Minister of Natural Resources, emphasized the coastal regional partnership and reported on the celebration of the 1st Chinese National Ecology Day on August 15.



During the opening ceremony, the invited speakers stressed the need to strengthen the harmony with nature, including coastal nature. 21 organizations, such as ICUN, ICLEI, and EAAFP, also officially launched the WCF Global Partnership Initiative to enhance the coastal ecosystem. Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, also participated in the WCF and shared information with experts.

HSF Korea Office Meeting with EAAFP and UNESCAP

On September 21, Mr. Hartmut Koschyk, HSF Korea project manager Mr. Young-Soo Kim, and senior researcher Dr. Hyunah Choi, had a meeting with EAAFP and the UNESCAP East and North-East Asia Office. They discussed cooperation on biodiversity and habitat conservation of endangered species in Northeast Asia. Mr. Koschyk also discussed soft tourism on the Korean Peninsula along the flyway with Ms. Jennifer George, chief of EAAFP.

Mr. Koschyk shared his unique experience related to soft tourism on the Korean Peninsula in 2018. The meeting participants agreed on much closer collaboration and will share future steps.

Launch of the Bee Conservation Project

On October 24, representatives of the Embassy of Slovenia, Korean Rural Community Cooperation (KRC), and HSF Korea met in Yangyang, Gangwon-do, to emphasize the importance of beekeeping and to launch a bee conservation project. Bees are indispensable for agriculture. They help to preserve biodiversity and produce important nutrition for "api"-medicine. An ambitious two-year plan was presented at the meeting. The aim is to create a bee-friendly forest. Also, a one-hectare area will be sown with yellow rapeseed flowers and 30 small trees will be planted. These "Honeybee Trees" (also Bee-Bee Trees, Korean: 쉬나무 shwi-namu), generously provided by Tree Planet, will serve not only as a haven for bees but also as a place where people can rest and recharge.



At the meeting, the trees were ceremonially planted. Plans are already underway for another tree planting meeting in spring, when the canola flowers that are to be planted next March will be in full bloom. Also, an international conference on modern trends in beekeeping, like urban beekeeping, as well as social and environmental aspects of beekeeping, is planned for 2024.

Shinan International Symposium on Migratory Birds

On November 2, the Shinan International Symposium on Migratory Birds took place in Shinan to seek solutions for better restoration and management of habitats of migratory waterbirds with experts, decision-makers, and local people. The conference has taken place annually since 2007 with a focus on migratory birds and the conservation of their habitat, such as coastal wetlands. The experts presented restoration and management cases abroad, especially in the UK and the East-Asian Australian Flyway. The experts also shared information on the Korean government's tidal flat Getbeol restoration plan and challenges. Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea also participated in this conference and discussed cooperation on wetland conservation at global, regional, and local levels.



Visit to the Ministry of Ecology in Uzbekistan

On November 14, Dr. Max Meier (HSF representative for Central Asia), Mr. Javkhar Dustov (HSF Uzbekistan), and Dr. Hyunah Choi and Ms. Minjae Baek from HSF Korea – visited the Ministry of Ecology, Environmental Protection and Climate Change of Uzbekistan and had a meeting with the Department of Environmental Policy and Protected Natural Areas to discuss HSF's activity during the CMS COP 14. They looked at the current development of their activities to prepare for the next steps.

After this meeting, the HSF delegation visited the Academy of Public Administration and lectured on the Green economy. The delegation and partners discussed how to cooperate to reach a Green Society even with the current less aggressive renewable energy generation target.



International Symposium in Yeoncheon

From November 21 to 22, HSF Korea participated in the International Symposium for Conservation of Scaly-sided Mergansers in Yeoncheon. Experts from the government, international organizations, and NGOs, discussed practices, the importance of international cooperation on birds, and biodiversity conservation in the climate crisis. Participants also visited the Imjin River Jusangjeolli area, Gunnam dam area (a geosite, biosphere reserve, and planned Flyway Network Site), and the Hantan River, where they encountered Scaly-sided Mergansers and Red-crowned cranes.



Dr. Nial Moores, director of BirdsKorea gave information on the unique landscape of Gunnam-dam area, where those 2 bird species share a habitat, and encouraged people to think about ways of habitat restoration.

UNFCCC COP 28 Side Event

On December 1, HSF Korea and Kookmin University co-organized a side event at the UNFCCC COP 28 Korean Pavilion with the partner organizations GCF-IEU, EcoKorea, Dabeo Inc., Korea Promotion Institute, and HSF Namibia. The participants discussed how to foster global climate talent and mainstream climate change initiatives, especially with youth. Dr. Lala Bear (HSF Namibia) and Dr. Hyunah Choi (HSF Korea), participated in this session and informed on HSF's climate action projects.



2023 American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting

On December 15, Dr. Hyunah Choi, senior researcher at HSF Korea, participated in the 2023 American Geophysical Union Fall Meeting to inform participants about HSF's activities related to birds and biodiversity on the Korean Peninsula. Experts across a broad range of scientific disciplines shared their research results. Dr. Choi also co-worked with experts from the OJERI-OJong Resilience Institute at Korea University to conduct a study on bridging science and policy for effective climate mitigation and sustainable carbon neutrality.

