

## Hanns Seidel Foundation/ UNESCAP Field Survey and Workshop on Conservation of Migratory Birds and Habitat at Rason Migratory Bird Reserve

27-30 March 2014, Rason Special Economic Zone, DPRK

### Background and Programme

#### I. Background

##### Rason Migratory Bird Reserve

Rason Migratory Bird Reserve had been designated as a category IV reserve (under IUCN criteria) by the Administration Council of Ratification in 1995, as one of the twenty-four migratory bird reserves in DPRK. It is located in Rason city, which borders China and the Russian Federation, and is adjacent to the Tumen River. The Reserve covers 3200 ha (32km<sup>2</sup>) of water and wetland area around three natural lakes: Lake Man, Lake Tongbon and Lake Sobon in Kulpho-ri, Rason City, North Hamgyong Province<sup>1</sup>. The lakes have been used for irrigation and aquaculture including prawn-farming, with duck farms at the lakeshore<sup>2</sup> and rice paddies closeby. Another small reserve, Rason Al Island Sea Bird Breeding Reserve, have been established on the nearby Beacon Island (8km from Rason city) since 1959.

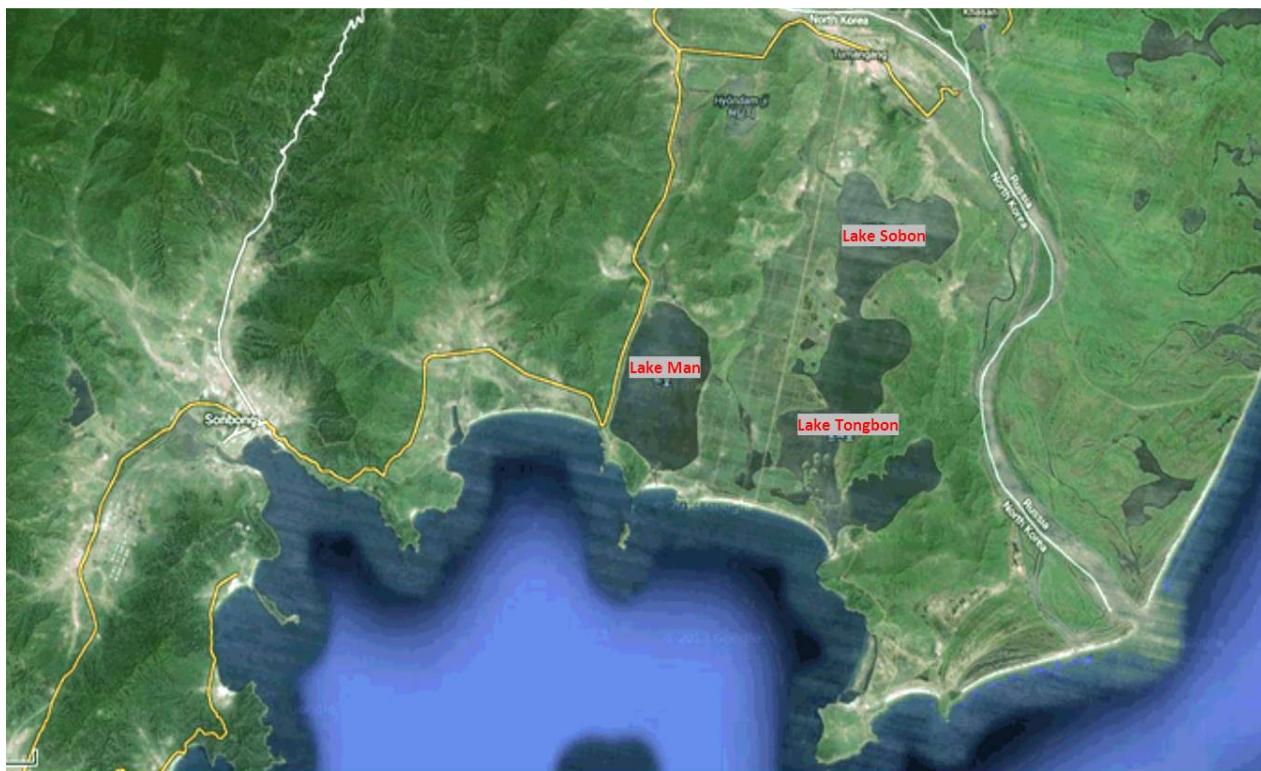
The Reserve's geographic location and favorable feeding conditions makes it an important transit habitat for migratory birds flying along the Asia-Pacific Flyway, more than 200 species of birds have been observed in this area and 31 of which are protected species. Until 2002, about 40 individuals of Red crowned Crane and between 60 to 420 White-naped Cranes have been observed annually during spring. These two species of cranes are amongst those migrate along the Korean East Sea coastline and can be found in the Reserve staying up to 7-10 days during spring (March to April) and autumn (September to November). Other protected species found in the Reserve include Whooper Swan, Bewicks Swan and Swan Goose.

As a habitat for protected migratory birds and a considerable number of other bird species, the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve is significant for the conservation of biodiversity. There is immediate need to conduct ecological research and assessment for developing management plan

<sup>1</sup> MAB National Committee of DPRK, *Natural Protected Areas in the DPRK*, Pyongyang (2005).

<sup>2</sup> MAB National Committee of DPRK, *Wetland (Waterfowl Habitat) and its Conservation in DPR Korea*, Pyongyang (2002).

for the Reserve, especially as it is part of the Rason Special Economic Zone (see Annex) and development is likely to take place such as tourism and transport infrastructure.



## Nature Conservation in North-East Asia and NEAPSEC

Habitat loss and degradation has been a major threat to biodiversity in the North-East Asia (NEA) subregion. To tackle subregional environmental challenges including nature conservation, NEA countries (China, DPRK, Japan, Mongolia, ROK and the Russian Federation) came together and established the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) in 1993, with UNESCAP East and North-East Asia Office (ENEA) currently serving as its secretariat.

NEASPEC adopted the Nature Conservation Strategy in 2007 and identified six flagship species<sup>3</sup> including White-naped Crane for targeted conservation actions. In 2013, NEASPEC kicked off a project on habitat conservation for migratory bird and held an expert group meeting in October. The meeting gathered subregional experts and international bird conservation programmes to review challenges in the subregion and developed the project implementation plan. Considering the importance of migratory bird habitats in DPRK and the vital need of DPRK's involvement for the success of habitat conservation, the Meeting called for efforts to actively explore opportunities to collaborate with DPRK on migratory bird habitat conservation. Further to the Meeting, UNESCAP ENEA consulted with Hanns Seidel Foundation on joint activities in DPRK and decided to hold a workshop together on conservation of migratory bird and its habitat at Rason Migratory Bird Reserve.

The Workshop in Rason will bring together international experts and agencies to review current status of migratory birds and habitat management. Possible conservation actions such as capacity building to integrate sustainable livelihood including farming and (eco)tourism in the area will be discussed. It will also be an opportunity to explore subregional collaboration possibilities, in particular, connecting with the overall NEASPEC migratory bird project and Nature Conservation Strategy. The 3-day survey will also generate preliminary data for formulating future conservation activities.

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<sup>3</sup> The six flagship species include: Amur Tiger, Amur Leopard, Snow Leopard, Hooded Crane, White-naped Crane and Black-faced Spoonbill.

## **II. Tentative Programme**

Workshop participants will enter DPRK to Rason through Hunchun (Jilin Province, China), followed by one day of workshop and three days of biodiversity survey as shown in the schedule below:

| Date                         | Activity   |
|------------------------------|--|
| <b>25 March (Tue)</b>        | Travel to Yanji (China)  |
| <b>26 March (Wed)</b>        | Depart from Yanji to Rason   |
| <b>27 March (Thu)</b>        | Workshop in Rason  |
| <b>28-30 March (Fri-Sun)</b> | Survey of birds and habitats (Lake Bonpo)                                    |
| <b>31 March (Mon)</b>        | Morning - visit Rason City<br>Afternoon – depart from Rason to Hunchun/Yanji |
| <b>1 April (Tue)</b>         | Depart from Yanji to home destination  |

## **III. Annex – The Rason Special Economic Zone, DPRK**

The Rason Special Economic Zone (formerly known as Rajin-Sonbong Economic Special Zone) which was established in 1991, is located immediately next to the border of China, DPRK and the Russian Federation. Its location has given the Zone much logistical advantage as its ports can be used for exports from China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation. Some ports have been systematically modernized during the past three years including a number of new building projects and increasing foreign investments have been entering the Zone.

The administration of the Rason Special Economic Zone is reportedly open for cooperation but to-date has not collaborated with external partners on bird conservation project. The Zone has been relatively undeveloped and only some research on tigers conducted with Khabarovsk in Russia has been carried out according to staff from the Environment Protection Bureau. Tigers are often found to cross the frozen Tumen River in winter. Recently there have been a number of changes in the area including the train service to Russia, twice a week from Pyongyang to Moscow, via Rason, Tumankang (a small village near Rason) and Khasan (Russia). A pavilion has been built on a hill overlooking the Rason landscape, and a large restaurant newly built nearby. The road connecting to these sites, are approximately 5-10 km from the Rason Migratory Bird Reserve, follows along the largest lake. Traffic was reportedly minimal in the area but it is likely to increase as a result of development in the Zone. There is long-term interest in Rason to develop ecotourism in bird-watching which may open new economic opportunities.