

Distribution and Conservation of Cranes in North Korea

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As in other nations, North Korea faces the challenge of protecting natural areas and wildlife including the habitat at important stopover sites and wintering grounds for migratory White-naped Cranes, Hooded Cranes and Red-crowned Cranes. These cranes breed in China and Russia and migrate through Korea.

It is our duty to pass on to the next generation these treasured national resources, especially the rare fauna and flora we enjoy today. Thus North Korea is undertaking a study of the conservation needs of important natural areas and hopes to increase the number and the size of nature reserves. Close collaboration with the Wild Bird Society of Japan has helped determine critical areas for cranes.

Red-crowned Cranes' winter home

For many years, the wintering areas for Red-crowned Cranes were known to be in the Choelwon Basin of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), and along the tidal mud flats of the southwest coast.

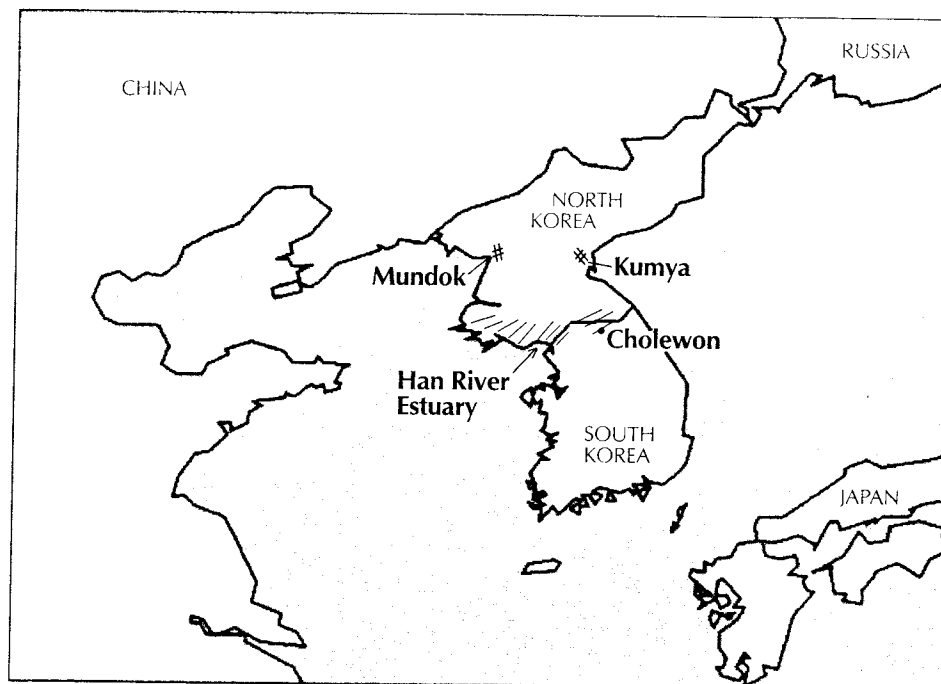
In the Choelwon Basin the cranes often roost at night in the DMZ then fly into South Korea to feed. While along the west coast they roost and feed on tidal mud flats, and in nearby paddy fields in a huge area measuring about 25 km X 29 km.

The Choelwon Basin and tidal mud flats are vital to large concentrations of geese, swans, ducks and shorebirds.

Because of the importance placed on the Red-crowned Cranes, 3000 hectares of coastal habitat is considered as State Natural Monument Number 412. Today, the North Korean Government is examining the possibility of strengthening the protection of these critical wetlands to assure the future of Red-crowned Cranes and other wetland birds.

Crane migration resting areas

Satellite data, gathered by attaching tiny radio transmitters to Hooded Cranes and White-naped Cranes on their win-



Important areas for cranes in North Korea.
Migration resting areas

Map by Rose Blada
/// Wintering areas for Red-crowned Cranes

tering grounds in Japan, has shown the importance of the DMZ, and the estuaries along the Chongchon River (west coast) and Songjon Bay (east coast) as resting areas of migrating cranes.

The Han and Injim rivers join near Panmonjam creating an extensive estuary along the western part in the DMZ. This Han River estuary and the Choelwon Basin in the central highlands provide the most important resting areas for the White-naped Cranes. Many of the cranes tracked spent seven to 30 days along the DMZ, whereas they only spent a few days at other resting areas.

Approximately 3000 hectares of estuarine wetlands and adjoining agricultural fields at the mouth of the Chongchun river, were designated as Mundok Wetland Reserve. All three endangered species of cranes, Hooded, White-naped, and Red-crowned, as well as Eurasian Cranes stop here. Cranes can be observed over a 50 day period from late February through early April, and in fall from late September through mid November. The reserve is also important to three species of geese, as well as Ruddy and Common Shelducks and snipe.

Across the peninsula along the northeast coast, are 2000 hectares of wetlands near Sanjon Bay. Again based

on satellite data, Kumya Wetland Reserve was established, although the area had previously been designated as State National Monument No. 275. The extensive reed beds in the estuaries of two rivers that spill into Sonjan Bay provide habitat for White-naped and Red-crowned Cranes in both spring and autumn as well as for 70 species of other birds, especially ducks and coots.

The North Korean Government is considering specific management and protection plans for both Mundok and Kumya Wetland Reserves.

Role of public participation

Outside of the DMZ, farmers and fishermen live beside and in the areas designated as nature reserves for cranes. The survival of these critical habitats for birds depends on these local people. Public education and sustainable use of wetland resources are vital.

The Government wishes to establish a national network of centers at each nature reserve where specialists will both study natural history and educate the local people about the importance of conservation. Then the heritage for the next generation of Koreans will not be diminished. Cranes will continue to announce the return of spring and autumn and the Red-crowned Cranes will grace our countryside throughout the winter. ■