formulation of an Anzali Wetland conservation plan since 2003 in order to improve waterside environments and protect valuable ecosystems for diverse flora and fauna. During the training course in Kushiro, the trainees and KIWC Secretariat members had opportunities to discuss ways of further developing the wetland conservation exchanges between Japan and Iran that began through the Anzali Wetland Ecological Management Project.

Participation in the Asian Wetland Symposium (China)

From October 11 to 13, 2011, the Asian Wetland Symposium was held in China's Wuxi City, and was attended by KIWC Senior Technical Committee member Mr. Hisashi Shinsho.

In his role as an expert in plant ecology, Mr. Shinsho has long researched the growth of alders in the Kushiro Wetland, and also served as the president of the fourth-term Kushiro Wetland Restoration Committee (2008 – 2010). During the symposium's parallel session on wetlands and forests, he outlined the rapid expansion of alders, which has recently become a major issue in the Kushiro Wetland, and detailed KIWC's efforts to prevent sediment influx from areas around the wetland (considered to be the cause of alder expansion) and to restore indigenous wetland vegetation.

The symposium was also attended by former JICA trainees who had been on KIWC training courses, individuals who had participated in United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) workshops and international conferences hosted by KIWC, and representatives of KIWC's sister wetland in Australia. The attendees made the most of the reunion to exchange recent information on wetland conservation and use.

Participation in the Symposium to Mark the 40th Anniversary of the Ramsar Convention (Okinawa)

On October 18 and 19, the Board of Municipalities Related to Japanese Ramsar Sites (a body of representatives from municipalities with Ramsar sites in Japan) held meetings in Naha city of Okinawa Prefecture. Prior to the gatherings, a public symposium to mark the 40th anniversary of the Ramsar Convention was held on October 17.

The event, titled Toward Revitalization of Nature, People and Local Communities with Wetland Tourism, was attended by board representatives, local NGOs and members of the general public. It included speeches by the mayors of Kaga and Takashima, case reports by a local residents' group and a panel discussion.

KIWC Secretary General Mr. Yoshikatsu Kikuchi attended the symposium and outlined examples of programs implemented to promote the wise use of the wetland and ecotourism in Kushiro, as well as initiatives to build on these programs for regional revitalization and enhanced collaboration with other countries.

Ramsar sites in Japan Series20 ~Kabukuri-numa and the surrounding rice paddies/Kejo-numa

Kabukuri-numa and the surrounding rice paddies: geese take flight

Kejo-numa: covered by lotus flowers and other aquatic plants

Kabukuri-numa and the surrounding rice paddies form a Ramsar site located in eastern Osaki City in northern Miyagi Prefecture, and Kejo-numa is a further Ramsar site in the northern part of the city. These two wetlands are less than 10 km apart, and serve as major stopovers for geese in Japan.

Kabukuri-numa formed as a back marsh of the Kitakami River. As it is surrounded by vast swaths of rice paddies and is low (just five meters above sea level), it plays the role of a retarding basin. While the marsh itself covers an area of only 150 ha, a 423-ha area including the surrounding rice paddies, which also act as a feeding ground for geese, was registered under the Ramsar Convention in 2005.

Up to 100,000 White-fronted Geese and more than 1,500 Bean Geese fly to the site every year. Tidal mud flats appear when the wetland's water level falls, making it an important stopover for snipes and plovers.

Academic experts, NPOs, national and prefectural government bodies and neighboring municipalities have worked closely to conserve the site by addressing various challenges, including a loss of water surface area, the need to disperse geese, and water quality improvement. As part of a government project to support the promotion of biodiversity conservation, various projects are under way, including the felling of problem trees, the restoration of an old channel, and monitoring surveys on wildlife, water quality and other considerations.

Meanwhile, Kejo-numa, whose northern part is in a hilly area, was previously an irrigation pond for downstream rice paddies, but was turned into a dam in 1995 to support flood control and agricultural irrigation. Its accessibility to main roads and the development of a public park in the area makes the site popular among locals.

Kejo-numa's compact mosaic of community-based forests (Japanese chestnut and konara oak trees), riparian forests (willow trees and alders), reed beds and wetland areas supports a variety of life. The wetland is known as a wintering site for geese, particularly the Bean Goose subspecies. The 34-ha area was registered under the Ramsar Convention in 2008.

About 10 kilometers northeast of Kejo-numa is another Ramsar site, Izu-numa and Uchi-numa, also representing a major stopover for geese. This area has particularly good accessibility among the three wetlands, and is seeking to form a Ramsar triangle with the other two to support tourism and exchanges and act as a hub for information services.

(Text and photo credit: Rural Areas Development Section, Industry and Economic Department, Osaki City)

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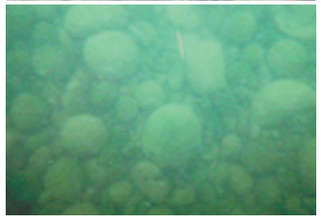
Kushiro International Wetland Centre (KIWC) is a regional network designed to use diversified regional facilities and human resources based in the Kushiro area in Hokkaido, which is endowed with nature. It is actively promoting public awareness and international cooperation activities for community-based wetland conservation.

The tsunami triggered by the Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, reached as far as the Kushiro region, causing substantial damage to port and fishery facilities and other coastal structures as well as to shops and houses, although fortunately there were no casualties in the region. Kushiro International Wetland Centre (KIWC) offers our heartfelt condolences to the families of those who perished in the disaster and their deepest sympathies to everyone affected. We would like to express our sincere appreciation once again to the many individuals and organizations who have provided kind words of support, including those involved in initiatives to conserve the Kushiro Wetland's sister wetland and other such areas in Japan and elsewhere as well as individuals who have participated in past training programs.

KIWC Technical Committee On-Site Study Meeting



Marimo algae ball colonies

On August 19, 2011, the KIWC Technical Committee held a study meeting at Lake Akan, a Ramsar site in relation to the committee's study theme for 2010 – 2012: Resident Participatory Water Environment Restoration from the Viewpoint of Biodiversity. Fifteen committee members, including experts in biodiversity conservation from the Kushiro region, attended the meeting and inspected marimo colonies in Churui Bay.

Marimo (*Aegagropila linnaei*) is a species of filamentous green algae that usually grows on rocks at the bottom of bodies of water or as floating filaments dissociated from rock. In Lake Akan, marimo grows into large balls in a phenomenon seen nowhere else in the world. The marimo algae balls in the lake have been designated as a special natural monument of Japan. Isamu Wakana, a KIWC Technical Committee member and curator of the Marimo Laboratory, Kushiro city Board of Education, gave a lecture on marimo, explaining that the spherical form grows only when certain conditions (such as those related to lake-bed terrains and wind-related wave generation) are met, and when the requisite minerals (hot-spring minerals in the case of Lake Akan) are provided. The lecture highlighted how Lake Akan's very limited area miraculously satisfies these conditions, and also clarified that the protection of marimo colonies requires preservation of the entire catchment area including rivers flowing into the lake and spring water.

The attendees' activities included inspecting marimo in the lake, looking at the surrounding aquatic environment and observing a marimo growth experiment underway in the Marimo Laboratory in Lake Akan Eco-museum Center. They then exchanged views and opinions on the environment of Lake Akan and discussed challenges relating to biodiversity conservation.

Winter Wetland Tour for WWD 2012

On January 28, 2012, KIWC held the Winter Wetland Tour 2012 event to mark the February 2 World Wetlands Day. A total of 25 staff and locals ranging from elementary school children to octogenarian took part in the trip to Lake Shirarutoro.

The group took the steam locomotive Fuyu-no-Shitsugen Train, which runs only in winter, from Kushiro Station to Kayanuma Station at the eastern edge of the Kushiro Wetland. During the hour-long journey, participants enjoyed viewing Hokkaido Sika Deer, Red-crowned Cranes and other wildlife, and took in the scenery of the snow-blanketed Kushiro Wetland.

After arrival, the group was guided by KIWC Senior Technical Committee member Mr. Hisashi Shinsho (who also acts as an environment facilitator) on a walk over the frozen Lake Shirarutoro and in its adjoining forest to observe wild animal tracks, ice conditions and other local characteristics. All participants lay on the frozen white lake surface and gazed at the wide-open sky while enjoying the breeze and the songs of birds.

After the walk, the group visited Ikoi-no-ie Kayanuma – a popular local spa facility – to warm themselves. This program, which is designed to promote enjoyment of the Kushiro Wetland in winter, was planned in keeping with the Wetlands and Tourism theme of the 2012 World Wetlands Day. Post-event feedback from the participants indicated hopes of being able to pass on the area's beautiful natural environment to future generations and to partake in wetland protection volunteer activities and related events. The program helped to highlight that having people directly experience and enjoy the beautiful natural environment of the wetland is a major step forward in enhancing public interest and enthusiasm for natural conservation.

Commemorating Event for the 40th Anniversary of Ramsar Convention
Public-participation Survey of a Restored River Environment, 2011
(FY 2011 Project Sponsored by the River Environment Fund)

The course of the Kushiro River in the Kushiro Wetland's Kayanuma District was straightened in the 1980s in the interests of flood control and farmland development. Meanwhile in 1987, the Kushiro Wetland was designated as a national park. In 2010, as the Kushiro Wetland Nature Restoration Project, the lower part of the straightened channel was re-meandered corresponding to the degradation of environment such as sediment influx.

KIWC has continuously implemented public participation environmental surveys for monitoring in areas near an old channel whose meander was restored after approximately 30 years. The aim of this monitoring is to enhance local residents' interest in the Kushiro Wetland and raise awareness of the Kushiro Wetland Nature Restoration Project.

In FY 2011, two surveys were conducted in summer and autumn with funding from the Foundation of River and Watershed Environment Management's River Fund. The surveys focused on environmental changes in the channel and its surrounding areas a year after water was allowed to flow into the channel again by meander restoration. Survey participants also discussed the expected effects of the Nature Restoration Project.

A backfilled straight channel (dotted line) and the channel where the meander was restored (arrow); photograph courtesy of the Kushiro Development and Construction Department

First Survey in Summer

On July 2, 2011, an environmental survey was conducted in the Kayanuma District in the town of Shibecha. The survey, which involved a monitoring study and was the third such investigation, was initiated in August 2010. A total of 28 locals, including elementary school and junior high school students, participated in the survey.

They were divided into three groups (an aquatic organism survey team, a soil survey team and a vegetation survey team), and investigated aquatic organisms, riverside vegetation and soil composition in an area stretching approximately one kilometer before and after the point where the backfilled straight channel joins the restored old channel. Four KIWC technical committee members joined the teams as leaders. These were Mr. Hisashi Shinsho (soil), Mr. Tsutomu Hariu (fish), Ms. Yachiyo Takashima (plants) and Mr. Shigeharu Terui (aquatic organisms).

Their work confirmed traces of floods and sedimentation, changes in the particle size of sediment carried from the upstream region, and other changes that had occurred during the year since the restoration of the old meandering channel. Impressions voiced by the participants included a realization that the river environment had undergone changes, albeit slowly, even though it was only a year since the restoration, and a new understanding of the motives for the meander restoration work (e.g., sediment influx prevention).

Second Survey in Autumn

On September 10, 2011, this year's second public-participation environmental survey was conducted in the district. A total of 25 locals ranging from teenagers to octogenarian contributed to the latest survey.

The participants paddled 5.5 kilometers down the river in three canoes from the area downstream of the restored old channel to the point where it joins the backfilled straight channel and on to the natural stream in the wetland's center. They observed water flows, riverbank erosion, traces of flooding, riparian environments and other aspects of the channel. With the guidance of KIWC senior technical member Mr. Hisashi Shinsho, the surveyors stopped at three sandbanks to examine the composition and other details of riverbank sediment carried from the upstream region.

Leaving the canoe, the participants visited the Lake Toro Eco-Museum Center (located by Lake Toro in the eastern part of the wetland) to review the results. They presented their findings and shared impressions among canoe groups. Some participants discovered traces of flooding in the restored channel, while others found differences in riparian vegetation between the inner and outer sides of curves in the natural stream. Some spotted red-crowned crane footprints on the sandbanks, and others spoke of the enjoyment of spending time in the huge wetland under the vast sky.

KIWC Technical Committee Chair for 2012 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award

KIWC Technical Committee Chair Dr. Tatsuichi Tsujii was selected for the 2012 Ramsar Wetland Conservation Award in Science. The accolade is given by the Ramsar Convention Secretariat in recognition of contributions by individuals and organizations around the world to promoting the conservation and wise use of wetlands. In addition to long playing a leading role in wetland conservation initiatives in Japan, Dr. Tsujii has also visited many wetlands in other countries to work with locals on investigations and conservation activities.

The award ceremony will be held during the Ramsar COP11 scheduled to take place in Romania in July 2012.

JICA Training Course on Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands

From June 6 to July 19, 2011, we received trainees from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for a group training course entitled Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands in the Context of Implementing the Ramsar Convention and the Convention on Biological Diversity. This course was held under the auspices of the Ministry of the Environment. In FY 2011, the trainees were four national and provincial government officials in charge of wetland and biodiversity conservation from Malaysia, Mongolia and the Philippines.

Taking advantage of Japan's environments of rich biodiversity, the training was held in the four locations of Okinawa, Fujiyoshida, suburban Tokyo and Kushiro in Hokkaido as venues that span the range from coral reefs and mangrove swamps in Japan's subtropical zone to peat swamp conditions in its subarctic zone. The trainees inspected facilities tasked with awareness-raising and research institutions, including premises run by the Ministry of the Environment, and attended lectures given by experts in biodiversity conservation and administrators in charge of biodiversity conservation policies. They also participated in eco-tours and environmental education programs in these areas. Through such experiences, they gained insights into specific methods for the conservation and wise use of wetlands based on the guiding principles of international conventions and related challenges.

At a report presentation session held on the last day of the course, they presented project proposals based on ideas they had formulated as a result of the training course. The proposals included environmental education programs for women and children, and bird monitoring surveys to be conducted at schools.

During their stay in Kushiro, the trainees also had a number of opportunities to interact with locals of all ages and positions through initiatives such as home-visit and school-visit programs.

JICA Training Course on Eco-tourism

From August 29 to October 4, 2011, the JICA ran a group training course on Eco-tourism for Sustainable Use of Natural and Cultural Resources with KIWC as the host organization. The course was attended by seven middle-ranking national and regional administrators tasked with natural park management and tourism promotion in Argentina, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Uganda, Vanuatu and Vietnam.

Eco-tourism has recently attracted attention in developing nations as a method of supporting regional development because it allows local residents to join in with tour operation and ensure the sustainable use of local natural and cultural resources in tourism, thereby enabling them to profit directly.

The trainees learned about eco-tourism from various viewpoints during the five-week period, participating in tours that highlighted the existing fishing and dairy faming industries, environmental education sessions, practical training in environmental monitoring and related inspections in the beautiful natural environment of eastern Hokkaido. They also learned about examples of eco-tour programs concerning historic sites and community-based forests in Tokyo and Kyoto with a focus on traditional Japanese culture and its relationship with nature.

The trainees had a variety of opportunities to interact and build friendships with Japanese people during the course. These included a home-visit program and exchange sessions with locals held in conjunction with a volunteer organization in Kushiro, an experiential environmental education program involving elementary school students, and a workshop with university students studying eco-tourism. The trainees, who were from countries with different natural environments and cultures, exchanged information on current situations and initiatives in their own countries and worked together to ensure a fruitful stay in Japan. The course was completed successfully.

JICA Jalapao Region Ecological Corridor Project

The JICA ran a training program in the Kushiro region for officials from Brazil's Ministry of the Environment from June 20 to 23, 2011. During the course, KIWC provided hands-on training on June 21 and 22. The program was implemented as part of the Ecosystem Corridor Project, under which JICA engages in technical cooperation in Brazil's Jalapao region to support the conservation of biodiversity in the country's tropical savanna. Three officials from the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio) – JICA's partner institution in the project – participated in the program.

The training introduced wetland conservation initiatives based on public-private partnerships, examples of wise use and awareness-raising techniques through lectures on networking for conservation of the Kushiro Wetland, practical training on environmental education, an inspection tour to facilities to provide nature information, and other activities.

JICA Iran's Anzali Wetland Ecological Management Project

From September 6 to 15, 2011, a JICA training course for officials from Iran's Department of Environment was held in Tokyo, Miyagi and Kushiro. The course was part of a technical cooperation project implemented by JICA in Iran to conserve the Anzali Wetland, and five officials from Iran attended.

On September 12 and 13, KIWC provided training with lectures outlining programs for conservation of the Kushiro Wetland and initiatives to promote environmental education. Trainees also went by canoe to observe sites where the Kushiro Wetland Nature Restoration Project was implemented and other places.

The Anzali Wetland is located on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea in Iran. Hosting lakes, rivers and marshes, the area is known as one of the world's major wintering and breeding habitats for waterfowl. It was registered in 1975, making it one of the oldest Ramsar sites in Iran. However, it was listed in the Montreux Record in 1993 due to recent water quality deterioration caused by urbanization, agricultural drainage, sediment influx and other problems.

In response to a request from the government of Iran, the government of Japan has provided, through JICA, technical support for the