



새와 생명의 터
BIRDS KOREA

April 22nd 2021

To the Honorable Mayor Seo Cheol Mo,

Birds Korea is a small and specialized NGO, with approximately 300 members in the Republic of Korea, and a global network of supporters and advisers, several of whom are professional conservation scientists.

We sincerely appreciate the opportunities we have enjoyed to date to support Hwaseong City's efforts to conserve the internationally important Hwaseong Wetlands, e.g., through helping to organise international symposia in 2018 and 2019; through helping to draft the Flyway Network Site (FNS) Site Information Sheet in 2018; and through research and reporting for the EAAFP-Hwaseong City Project, "International Symposium on the Hwaseong Wetlands and International Cooperation Projects" in 2020 and early 2021.

Today, we are writing to express once more our support for Hwaseong City and your efforts to move towards fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals through the conservation of Ramsar-defined internationally important concentrations of waterbirds supported by the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS. As part of this support, we are also writing directly to you to express our growing concerns over disturbance which will be caused by a hotel resort, as proposed to be constructed immediately adjacent to the Maehyangri Tidal Flats. In agreement with experts in SAVE International, we consider this site would be much more valuable to Hwaseong City instead as the location of a carefully-designed, ecologically-sustainable World Class Nature Centre.

Following our online post about the hotel proposal (at: <http://www.birdskoreablog.org/?p=24279>) on March 22nd, we were contacted by several shorebird researchers who wished to express their concerns. Together with experts, and with input from National KFEM and Hwaseong KFEM, we drafted a letter to be shared with you and other decision-makers in central government. This letter follows immediately below.

In addition to my own signature, the letter is signed by leading scientists and shorebird specialists from the Russian Federation, PR China, Australia and New Zealand. The letter is also signed by Professor Theunis Piersma in the Netherlands, considered by many to be the world's leading expert on shorebird ecology.

With sincere respect,

Dr Nial Moores, Director, Birds Korea

To Whomsoever it may concern,

As conservation scientists and professional researchers, we are writing at this time to offer our support to decision-makers, NGOs and local communities in their efforts to conserve the waterbirds of the Hwaseong Wetlands Flyway Network Site (FNS) in Hwaseong City, Gyeonggi Province. We are also writing to express our growing concern at the proposed construction of a hotel resort immediately adjacent to the Maehyangri Tidal Flats, which form a key part of the Flyway Network Site.

To the best of our understanding, the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS is one of the most important shorebird sites in the Republic of Korea and in the Yellow Sea. Moreover, the Maehyangri Tidal Flats are the most important component part of the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS for those waterbird species which are ecologically dependent on intertidal wetlands for food and other resources, enabling them to complete long and perilous annual migrations successfully.

Most waterbird species, including shorebirds, are sensitive to disturbance caused by people. Many species of shorebird fly away when still at a substantial distance from sources of disturbance, which can include people simply walking on the tidal flat. The recently-announced hotel complex, as proposed within 100 m of the Maehyangri Tidal Flats, and related infrastructural development (which will include road-widening and the removal of a fence), will in our opinion result in a substantially increased level and frequency of disturbance to the waterbirds which need to feed and roost at this site.

Based on the “Wise Use of Hwaseong Wetlands” report, posted on March 31st on the website of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership Secretariat, we understand that the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS regularly supports at least 16 species of waterbird in internationally important concentrations of more than 1% of a population as defined by the Ramsar Convention. This total includes at least eight species of shorebird which are ecologically dependent on tidal flats, three of which are assessed by the IUCN as globally Near Threatened (Eurasian / Far Eastern Oystercatcher; Eurasian Curlew; Bar-tailed Godwit) and two of which are assessed by the IUCN as globally Endangered (Far Eastern Curlew and Great Knot). In addition, there is a recent record within 500 m of the proposed hotel site of a single Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper, and multiple records of globally Endangered Nordmann’s Greenshank. In addition to shorebirds, three more globally threatened waterbirds are regularly found on the Maehyangri Tidal Flats in Ramsar-defined internationally important concentrations: Saunders’s Gull, Black-faced Spoonbill and Chinese Egret.

Because of their exceptional importance to waterbirds and to fisheries, the Maehyangri Tidal Flats clearly meet Ramsar Convention criteria used to identify internationally important wetlands.

The conservation and wise use of internationally important wetlands like the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS is both in the national and global interest. However, many waterbird species in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway are in decline, indicating a continuing and chronic loss of wetland ecosystem health and diversity. Causes of declines in waterbirds in general and of shorebirds in particular are many, but permanent habitat loss from development and temporary or permanent habitat loss due to disturbance, especially of sensitive roost sites, are major causes.

Research conducted along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway indicates that increased levels of disturbance close to foraging and roost sites, as likely to be caused by this proposed hotel resort and road development, can result in substantially increased energy expenditure by shorebirds, as birds are forced to fly more frequently and further from these sources of disturbance. In the case of long-range migratory shorebirds like the Far Eastern Curlew, increased energy use associated with as few as ten disturbance-

caused “escape” flights per day could have negative consequences to the point of reducing survival or reproductive success, thus negatively impacting the species’ population in long-term.

In addition to calling for a thorough Environmental Impact Assessment to assess and mitigate all impacts on waterbirds to be caused by any development close to the Maehyangri Tidal Flats, our further advice is that there is also a clear need to improve habitat condition for waterbirds within other parts of the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS. Roost sites are needed by shorebirds during high tide when tidal flats are covered by seawater. Based on available evidence and observed use patterns, two key shorebird roost sites in the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS are (1) the southeastern shore of the Hwaseong Reclamation Lake and (2) a shallow wetland, referred to locally as “Pond 13”. These two roost sites will only remain usable by reducing disturbance and by maintaining suitable shallow water levels. It is very important to conserve and manage both the Maehyangri Tidal Flats, which are critical for feeding, and these two roost sites, which are critical resting places at high tide, in order to support shorebird populations.

A substantial body of scientific evidence has shown that equitable, economic, environmental and social benefits can only be accrued through appropriate management and wise use of internationally important wetlands. Protection of the Maehyangri Tidal Flat and nearby roost sites will both benefit the waterbirds and also create golden opportunities for responsible eco-tourism and environmental education, as demonstrated at many other Ramsar Sites throughout the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

In closing, as experts specializing in the conservation of waterbirds, we would again like to encourage Hwaseong City and relevant government bodies in the Republic of Korea to conserve these internationally important wetlands and the birds that depend upon them, ideally through designation of the Hwaseong Wetlands FNS as a nationally protected wetland area and Ramsar site. Following designation, ongoing evidence-based management will then be required to maintain this habitat in good condition into the future.

Respectfully,

Dr Nial Moores	Director, Birds Korea, Republic of Korea, PhD in Conservation of Avian Biodiversity
Professor Richard Fuller	Professor of Biodiversity and Conservation, University of Queensland, Australia
Professor Zhijun Ma	Professor, School of Life Sciences, Fudan University, Shanghai, China
Dr Phil Battley	Associate Professor of Zoology, Massey University, New Zealand
Dr Diana V Solovyeva	Laboratory of Ornithology, Institute of Biological Problems of the North, Magadan, Russia EAAFP Scaly-sided Merganser Task Force Coordinator. SSC, IUCN



Dr Amanda Lilleyman	Former Research Associate, NESP Threatened Species Hub - The Curlew Project, Australia
Dr Micha Jackson	Research Fellow, University of Adelaide, Australia
Katherine Leung	Director, Kalidris Ecological Ltd. and Coordinator, Hong Kong Waterbirds Ringing Group
Dr Sora Marin-Estrella	Centre for Ecosystem Management / School of Science Edith Cowan University, Australia
Jing Li	Operation Director, Spoon-billed Sandpiper in China
Adrian Riegen	Convener of New Zealand Wader Study Group and vice chair of Pūkoro Miranda Naturalists' Trust, New Zealand
Chris Hassell	Coordinator of research in Australia, Global Flyway Network
Rob Schuckard	Coordinator Shorebird Monitoring and Shorebird Research Top of South Island - New Zealand.
Hebo Peng	PhD candidate of the University of Groningen, researching Yellow Sea shorebirds, based at the NIOZ Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research
David Melville	Global Flyway Network, New Zealand
Prof. Dr Theunis Piersma	Founder and chair of Global Flyway Network, Rudi Drent Chair in Global Flyway Ecology at the University of Groningen, and Senior Research Leader at NIOZ Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research, Texel, The Netherlands











