

Creating the way towards co-existence of community and the Japanese Crested Ibis

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(Environmental Construction for co-existence of Human Beings
and the Japanese Crested Ibis Project-JICA)

The Japanese Crested Ibis is a bird which takes loaches, frogs, crabs, and insects in rice paddies, ponds, or rivers. They nest mostly on the high trees around the farmhouse, roost in the forests not far away from the village. It is very difficult for them to live-on without human beings around. To protect the bird does not mean excluding human activities, but finding a way of harmonious co-existence between human and them.

Formerly, the Japanese Crested Ibis has been widely distributed in China, Far-eastern Russia, Korea peninsula and Japan. However, its population has sharply decreased for hunting and environmental deterioration. After 1960s, the species became distinct in Far-eastern Russia and Korea Peninsula. In Japan, the last local Japanese Crested Ibis also died in 2003.

In China, 1970s, the species was considered as almost extinct. But in 1981, 7 Japanese Crested Ibises were found in Yang county of Shaanxi Province. The protection program was started at that time. Related organizations, including Department of Forestry of Shaanxi Province, Yang county government, Shaanxi Hanzhong Crested Ibis Nature Reserve Bureau etc, began to actively working on the protection of the birds. Many-sided measures taken so far include, conserving and/or improving habitat such as nesting site, feeding place, issuing the ordinance to prohibit hunting, promoting local people's awareness, setting up rescue and artificial propagation station. With 30 years hard-working, now, the number of the birds in the wild, already reached to around 800, and in captive breeding raised around 800.

Although, the species temporarily get out of their critically endangered status in China, conservation of the Japanese Crested Ibis is facing new challenges. Around their important habitats, the local government have set the measure to prohibit or limit the usage of agri-chemicals and chemical fertilizer, which increased possibility of plant diseases and insect pests, and led to crops-failure and farmers losses. Making a point of local people condition, the local government and the Nature Reserve Bureau have been taking the measures which include signing contracts with farmers to reward their cooperation, providing special subsidy to reduce farmers' losses etc. However, with the continuous expansion of their habitats and rapid development of the rural economy, how to coordinate the farmer's life with the protection and conservation of the Japanese Crested Ibis is getting harder and harder.

As the next stage of the conservation activities for the Japanese Crested Ibis, a new mode that “Farmers join in the conservation activities on their own initiative” is to be developed. The key of well building-up this new concept is how to take advantage of the favorable environment where the Japanese Crested Ibises inhabit, to improve the living of the local people. Developing green industry, such as organic agriculture, eco-tourism etc., could contribute to the local economy and lead to the way for harmonious co-existence of human and the Japanese Crested Ibis.

With such background, in Sep.2010, State Forestry Administration of China and Japan International Cooperation Agency started their new 5 years cooperation project--“Environmental Construction for Co-existence of Human Beings and the Japanese Crested Ibis”. National Bird Banding Centre is the management body of the project, where the experts from Japan join in. The project sites includes 3 places; Shaanxi Hanzhong National Nature Reserve, Dong Zhai National Nature Reserve, and Ningshan County of Shaanxi province. The project focuses on encouraging protection and conservation activities for the species, improving local people’s living standard, and developing environment education to raise the local people’s awareness. Activities now on going in cooperation with the related organizations and local people, include providing technical assistance and training for reintroduction and monitoring of the birds, organic-ecological farming, environmental education, etc. Facilities for those activities are also provided. With all these activities, the project aims at setting up a model of environmental construction through which co-existence of human beings and the Japanese Crested Ibis is realized.