The Republic of Korea has designated Dongcheon Estuary as its newest Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site no.2269). Located in the south-eastern part of Suncheon City, the Estuary supports vital wintering and stopover habitats for 237 species of birds, of which at least 13 are globally threatened including the critically endangered spoon-billed sandpiper (*Eurynorhynchus pygmeus*), endangered black-faced spoonbill (*Platalea minor*), and far-eastern curlew (*Numenius madagascariensis*).

The Site acts as a transition zone between river and marine environments that provide habitat for 848 species of wild flora and fauna, and a rich aquatic biodiversity due to its varying salinity and nutrients and organic detritus in its sediment.

Reed and rice fields along both sides of Dongcheon River provide habitats for a wide range of wild mammals, aquatic insects and amphibians. The rice fields are key for migrating waterbirds such as hooded cranes (*Grus monacha*), and serve as one of the largest wintering grounds for white-naped cranes (*Grus vipio*).

The annual number of visitors to Dongcheon Estuary as well as the adjacent Suncheon Bay Ramsar Site increased from 1.2 million in 2005 to 1.9 million in 2015, about four times the population of Suncheon City.

Of the entire area of Dongcheon Estuary, almost 54% is privately owned and the rest of the land is owned by the national government. Only non-commercial fishing activities are allowed and the only commercial activities on the Site are rice production in its paddy fields.

Mr Chongwon Choi, the Director of Nature Policy Division of the Korean Ministry of Environment, emphasized that “The designation of Dongcheon Estuary reinforces the protection network that connects Suncheon Bay - a costal wetland Ramsar Site and a popular ecotourism destination - and Dongcheon Estuary, an inland wetland.” He added that “the designation holds significance in that this effort is recognized internationally”.