Japan adds Izumi Wintering Habitat of Cranes to the List of Wetlands of International Importance

19 November 2021

Japan has designated its 53rd Wetland of International Importance. Izumi Wintering Habitat of Cranes ("Ramsar Site" no. 2462) is located on the island of Kyushu at the end of the Izumi alluvial fan, where three rivers converge: the Takaono, the Noda and the Euchi. It is mainly covered with rice paddies, together with open water at the estuaries and sandbars that appear during low tides.

This area is one of the best birdwatching sites in Japan, with about 300 of the 650 species of wild birds in the country. The wetland is known as an internationally important wintering site for threatened crane species, including almost all of the global population of hooded crane (Grus monacha) and about half of the global population of white-naped crane (Grus vipio). It also provides shelter for the vulnerable common pochard (Aythya ferina).

To facilitate crane conservation, the local government established the Council for Crane Conservation Measures of Kagoshima Prefecture in the mid-1950s, and later the Kagoshima Crane Conservancy. Local junior high school students have been conducting crane count surveys since 1960, continuing to this day for 62 years. The area was designated as a national special natural monument in 1952, and the no-hunting zone was expanded in 1962. The Izumi-Takaono National Wildlife Protection Area special protection zone was designated in 1987 and extended in 2021.

The Izumi Wintering Habitat of Cranes provides numerous services to surrounding communities, including food production, maintenance of hydrological regimes, hazard reduction, tourism and religious activities.