



Poyang Lake Newsletter

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Piloting provincial-level wetland PA system in Jiangxi Province

Project progress

Progress in piloting wetland rehabilitation programme

Up to date, the validation of wetland restoration pilot proposal, project construction design, and use of lands for piloting activities have been supported by the local government. The Wucheng Town is now building itself as a place of scenic interest named the “Town of Migratory Birds”, which is an important part of the coming big event of “Poyang Lake International Bird Watching Week”(6-10 December 2019). The Zhushi Lake, Dahuchi, Changhuchi, and Sha Lake in the Wuchen Town are the major bird-watching places.

On 29 May 2019, the wetland rehabilitation consultant submitted an updated wetland restoration pilot proposal to the Poyang Lake National Nature Reserve (PLNNR) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) project management office (PMO). As some of the sample plots in the demonstration area are located in the all-year-round exposed area, 1.2 ha of land needs to be leased and land

for micro-geomorphic transformation in the central lake region has to be negotiated with the contractors for utilization. In the meantime, the GEF wetland restoration pilot program has been incorporated into the plan of “Town of Migratory Birds”. On 20 June 2019, Yu Jun, deputy director of Jiangxi GEF PMO, had a dialogue with the Wucheng township government and both parties reached a preliminary consensus on the utilization of land for project demonstration areas. It is expected to start the civil construction in December 2019, and the water level control and microrelief reconstruction in demonstration area will be carried out soon.



Field visit to project demonstration areas

The project titled “Science and Technology Project of Beautiful China Ecological Civilization” that is led by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, a co-financier of the GEF project, aims at improving biodiversity and restoring

wetland ecological function in Changhuchi. The project objectives include control of hydrology, rehabilitation of wetland vegetation, micro-geomorphic transformation, as well as reconstruction of habitats.

On 24 July 2019, a supervision task force consisting of experts and project staff visited Changhuchi for an on-site survey. The expert team includes: Zhou Wei, former director of the reservoir department of the three Gorges Office of the State Council; Luo Yi, vice president of the China Environmental Protection Industry Association; Liu Jiyan, researcher of the Institute of Geographic Resources of the Chinese Academy of Sciences; Xing Xiaoxu, director of the Bureau of Science and Technology Development of the Chinese Academy of Sciences; Sun Congli, deputy director of the major science and technology bureau of the Chinese Academy of Sciences; Liao Xiaoyong, director of the special project office; Cui Jing, deputy director of the special project office, Qiao Yunfeng, deputy director of the PMO and Li Xiaomeng.



Expert team visits Changhuchi

Xia Shaoxia, the focal point for the GEF wetland restoration pilot program, introduced the hydrological characteristics of Poyang Lake wetland and analyzed the key drivers of wetland ecosystem degradation to the expert team. At the same time, Xia Shaoxia reported the progresses in piloting wetland rehabilitation programme, such as in situ cutting experiments, vegetation strip restoration, baseline survey, and micro-geomorphological transformation. The experts highly affirmed the importance of restoration of waterbird habitats in Poyang Lake. They reviewed and approved the designed wetland

restoration pilot concepts and interventions that learned experiences in restoration from Mipu Wetland and London Park Wetland in Hong Kong.

Capacity building of staff and management in NRs

On 26 June 2019, a one-day training session was held in Nanchang City on the subject of “Survey and Monitoring of Water Deer”. Several partners, such as PLNNR, Nanji National Nature Reserve (Nanji NR), as well as Duchang Provincial Migratory Bird Nature Reserve (Duchang NR) attended the training.



Training in Water Deer survey and monitoring

Li Yankuo, the Water Deer consultant, delivered a presentation on the status of Water Deer research in Poyang Lake, a multi-dimensional analysis on its population distribution and ongoing threats. The trainees learned how to monitor and conduct a survey on Water Deer, how to improve protection measures and conduct public educational activities, as well as how to develop a feasible framework for monitoring and protection plan.

Through this business skill training, the capacity and competencies of three demonstration nature reserves in carrying out Water Deer monitoring and protection tasks were both enhanced.

Additionally, a ceremony for signing agreements with the PLNNR, Nanji NR and Duchang NR to implement biodiversity monitoring program under the GEF project was held on the sidelines of the training.



Ceremony for signing agreements with three demonstration nature reserves

Following the target of output 1.2—expansion of geographic coverage of operationally effective wetland protected areas in Poyang Lake region, and output 2.2—PWEPA Management Framework, a two-day training session was organized from 9-10 July 2019 in Nanchang City. The aim was to improve the capacity of implementing and supervising management plans. The leaders and technicians from the PLNRR, Nanji NR, Duchang NR, Liaohuachi NR, as well as Huyun Tundra Swan NR participated in this training course.

The training class comprised three parts: i) how to write a project proposal; ii) how to design environmental education and publicity programs; and iii) how to implement management plans and monitor the progress and results. Fan Longqing, Deng Weijie from Sichuan Agriculture University, and Liu Fuwen were invited for teaching and mentoring.



Training in implementing protected area management plans

In the wrap-up meeting, Zhu Qi, director of Jiangxi GEF project, pointed out that this training class greatly increased NR staff's knowledge in development, implementation and monitoring of PA management plans, and enhanced effective management of PAs. He hoped that the trainees can put what they learned into practice, and actively engaged in project activities to ensure more efficient and speedier implementation of the GEF project.

A ceremony for signing agreements with PLNRR, Nanji NR and Duchang NR to implement community co-management program under the GEF project was held after the closure of the training.

Progress in establishing PA sustainable financing mechanism

Linking to output 2.2—Establish sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA network, the wetland PA financing consultant started to carry out social economic investigation within Poyang Lake Wetland Ecosystem Protected Area (PWEPA), including fund raising sources for wetland protection, financing requirements, ecological compensation, etc. The investigation was designed to collect information from farmers, fishermen and enterprises in Poyang Lake region on the “co-building and benefit shared” market mechanism or their willingness to be compensated for wetland protection. They also paid visits to the Forestry Department, the Financial Department, the Development and Reform Commission, etc., to review the existing government budget allocations for wetland protection measures, infrastructure, and capacity building, as well as for the day to day operation of the wetland reserves.

From July 9 to 22, the eight-member wetland PA financing expert team conducted a rural household survey in 14 counties and villages bordering the PLNRR, Nanji NR and Duchang NR and collected 778 copies of questionnaires filled by local farmers.

On July 23 and 25, the expert team visited the Forestry Department, the Financial Department, the Development and Reform Commission to collect more information and prepare for the following workshop on PWEPA sustainable financing mechanism.



Wetland protected area financing expert team conducting survey

On July 24, a workshop on the subject of “Establish sustainable financing mechanism for the PWEPA network” was held in Nanchang, Jiangxi province to facilitate increased long-term funding for the national and provincial wetland nature reserves. More than 40 guests and participants from the PLNNR, the Forestry Department of Jiangxi Province, the Nanji NR, the Duchang NR, World Wildlife Fund (WWF), International Crane Foundation (ICF), as well as China Agricultural University attended the event.

The workshop provided opportunities for the participants to: 1) share knowledge on successful wetland PA sustainable financing mechanism in China and abroad; 2) review the current wetland ecological compensation policies in Jiangxi Province; 3) share experiences in fund raising solutions with WWF and ICF; 4) present financing status and challenges faced by each nature reserve; 5) discuss and analyze the obstacles and potential solutions for the PWEPA sustainable financing mechanism.



Workshop on establishing wetland PA sustainable financing mechanism

Highlights

How to build a win-win relationship between human beings and birds?

A new exploration with innovation helps the Nanji Wetland Nature Reserve find a balance between natural resource use and bird protection

Background

The Nanji wetland is an important intermediate stop during migratory birds' flyway from East Asia to Australia. More than 10 seasonal lakes in the area are main wintering grounds for 100,000 migratory birds each year, nearly 90 species including cranes, swans and geese. However, the main source of income for local residents also depends on fishery production. In order to protect fish and shrimp from wintering birds, the fishermen take various ways to drive birds away. In this case, it was difficult for local governments and departments to strike a balance between protecting migratory birds and the interests of fishermen.

In order to solve the contradiction between the fishery activities of local fisherman and the bird food chain and habitat, after years of exploration, the Nanji National Nature Reserve Bureau decided to adopt measures to reward fishermen by counting birds on their responsible lakes.

This activity is usually carried out in December or January. The task force of Nanji National Nature Reserve Bureau counted the number of wintering birds in the contracted lakes of fishermen participating in the contest. According to the number and species of water birds, fishermen will receive corresponding rewards. This initiative has greatly enhanced the enthusiasm of local fishermen to protect wintering birds and bird habitat. In recent years, with the continuous development of this activity, wintering birds have larger habitat and longer time for feeding. In addition, it has greatly increased the awareness of local residents on bird protection.

There was once a poem describing the unique landscape of Poyang Lake: "You never know how many birds there are. They cover the clouds and moon in flying, and blacken the riverbank in settling". During autumn months, the drip in water levels exposed a large number of mudflats and left many isolated sub-lakes. Thousands of migratory birds travel here every year for wintering and breeding. The Nanji wetland is of great significance for biodiversity conservation and ecosystem safety for Poyang Lake and the entire middle and lower reaches of Yangtze River.

There is only one community living on two islands in the experimental zone, and most of the residents live on fishing.

People make a living by raising fish while birds feed on fish. The contradiction between man and bird was once considered as an unsolved game. However, now in the Nanji Wetland Nature Reserve, people and birds are getting along with each other in a peaceful and harmonious way.

Contradiction in the past: protection VS development

The Nanji Wetland National Nature Reserve was established in 1995. During the wet season, the entire protected areas apart from two islands are covered by under the Poyang Lake water system; during the dry season, most of the protected areas are grasslands and marsh.

On the way to the Nanji wetland, the staff of the reserve encouraged a group of bird watchers. "Amazing!" Paul Holt from England watched the movements of the little creatures from his binoculars and exclaimed, "This is a Pied Avocet, only a few hundred have been observed in Britain at present, but they can be seen everywhere here. Look! That is an Oriental Stork, it is no less rare than a panda." The bird watchers told staff that it was not easy to conserve such a paradise for migratory birds against a backdrop of worsening global climate.

Actually, the Nanji township government had struggled with the choice of survival priorities. Chen Gongdao, a member of the Nanji township party committee, told the

project staff that between mid-December and early January of the following year, it was the season for fishermen to drain water to harvest fish and also the season of food shortage for wintering birds. For fishermen, fight for food between human beings and birds is a competition for living space; for the Nanji township government, it faces a choice to make between wetland protection and economic development.

Chen Gongdao still remembers a story 10 years ago. An investor from Hubei Province spent six months in the Nanji wetland nature reserve for a willing of investment in a 266.6ha lobster farming project. At the same time, a leading local enterprise intended to use grasslands for a business of 10,000 beef cattle breeding. The tax revenue of these two projects would be as high as 10 million yuan a year, which was so tempting! However, the Nanji township government gave up the chance. "The economic development may be slower without big projects, but it must not cause damage to the ecosystem." Officials of the Nanji township government believe that no matter how large the investment is, they will say no if it affects the ecology and habitats of migratory birds.

The answer to a long-standing question

The local government has long faced a question, that is, how to address the conflict between ecological protection and economic development?

Hu Binhua, director of the Nanji National Nature Reserve Bureau, revealed the answer.

Passing by Baisha lake, thousands of cranes, geese and ducks were enjoying their delicious food in the mud. The fishermen didn't catch or drive them away.

The change in attitude stemmed from an attempt made four years ago by the Nanji Nature Reserve, which signed an ecosystem and rights based co-management agreement with fishermen to jointly manage the lake. There are a few regulations for fishermen to obey, such as no draining water, no fishing and no disturbing during migratory birds' wintering season. Hu Binhua told us, "It is far from enough to rely solely on the government's influence to protect wetlands and migratory birds." For a

long time, the Nanji wetland nature reserve not only took the great ecological protection responsibility, but also shouldered huge pressure of economic development. In recent years, the Nanchang municipal government has continuously improved the ecological compensation mechanism, by taking the benefit compensation for the people living in the protected area into the overall regional development .

According to Nanji Nature Reserve’s survey of all sub-lakes, and the fishermen were rewarded based on the species and number of waterbirds. “This time I got the most bonus in the amount of 27441 Chinese Yuan, as there were 290 individuals of Oriental Storks, 1900 Eurasian Spoonbills on my lakes.” A fisherman told the staff of the reserve.



Opening ceremony of the bird protection contest for 2017-2018

Huang Shengsheng, a fisherman in Xiangyang Villange who participated in this contest with more than 400 ha of contracted lakes, can receive an tens of thousands of an extra income by tens of thousands of yuan each year. After living on the island for so many years, he never imagined that one day he would be able to get along well with the birds and benefit from birds.

The benefits arising from this initiative changed fisherman’s attitude towards ecosystem protection. They became part of the force to conserve wetlands and migratory birds, which helped the Nanji Nature Reserve to

address the problem of no administration and the use rights of lakes, and reduced the costs of wetland PA management.

Now, walking in the wetland, no one hears the sound of firecrackers or sees the bird catcher nets. On the contrary, the agritainment become prosperous. When PMO staff visited the Hongwu Village, Xiong Xiaofeng, the hostess of an agritainment resort prepared a delicious meal to welcome the team. During bird watching season, she would receive over 500 guests a day, earning more than 100,000 yuan. She also spontaneously organized a female bird protection promotion team to provide bird protection knowledge to tourists.

Nowadays, more and more fishermen choose to return home to start their own business. There are more than 60 agritainment resorts in the township, creating job opportunities for over 300 persons. In the last year, the number of visitors to the wetland reached 200 000. Now the number of bird species in the Nanji Nature Reserve has increased from 200 to 206, half of the world’s remaining 3,000 Oriental storks spend their winter here.

During the night, the small Xiangyang village became quiet. The villagers walked gently as they knew that there might be a bird resting in the nearby grassland. “Listen! The Grey Crane is singing like a little cat, the voice of Swan Tundra sounds like baby’s crying.” The fishermen learned skills of recognizing birds via their voices after several years of experiences in bird protection. When migratory birds have limited access to food because of extremely cold weather, the fishermen will feed them with corn and rice.

“Only when we provide a suitable habitat to birds, will they come, and so will the tourists.” Xiong Xiaofeng, a villiager’s simple words gave the answer to the question that hadn’t been solved for ten years.



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