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Korean Wetlands Impress Ramsar Participants



A girl hangs memo with her wishes written on the "tree of hope" in front of Changwon Exhibition Convention Center building in South Gyeongsang Province, Saturday. / Korea Times Photo by Shim Hyun-chul

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Staff Reporter

Wetlands in southern parts of Korea captured the hearts of participants at the 10th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Convention on Wetlands. On Sunday's excursion to Ramsar-enlisted wetlands and cultural historical sites, attendees expressed satisfaction and surprise.

Categorized into different courses with different themes ranging from "Wetlands and Birds," "Wetlands and Culture," "Wetlands and the Environment," "Environment and Nature," and "Wetlands and Temples," seven routes were developed to allow more than 500 participants catch a glimpse of Korea's wetlands. Among their must-see list were Upo wetlands, Junam Reservoir wetlands, Bongam tidal island, Wangdeungjae wetlands, Woegok wetlands, and Suncheon Bay in Jeolla Province, alongside relics of ancient kings and renowned temples such as Haeinsa.

Visitors were able to see rare birds and ducks paddling in the wetlands. Listening to professional eco-tour guides' explanations, the environmental experts shared their ideas on the sites.

At the country's most famous natural wetlands, Upo, the little grebe, wood sandpiper, and other rare species swimming or flying low to the water brought exclamations from the participants. "It is very impressive! It shows that the place is clean," a non-governmental organization member from the United States who declined to identify herself said.

The cultural events of traditional good harvest-wishing rituals, musical performance and children's tug of war in traditional costumes also drew attention.

A quick trip to Mokpo wetlands, an auxiliary to Upo where a pair of recently imported crested ibis are staying, brought the visitors, from all around the world, together.

Regardless of where they were from, delegates and NGOs gathered and spoke on various issues. Eco tour guide Choi Chi-ok said the visitors seemed happy. "Our initial goal was to let people feel the fresh and serene atmosphere of Upo and other wetlands. I hoped they would like it and they seem to," she said.

Sonali Senaratna Sellamuttu, a researcher at International Water Management Institute, said she wanted to visit the places again to look more deeply case by case. "I am interested in how the wetlands contribute to local water management and I will be pleased to see how Korea is dealing with it," she said.

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People crowd the plaza in front of an exhibition building where the Ramsar Convention is being held. / Korea Times



A girl looks at various installments wishing for success of the Ramsar Convention held at the CECO outside the building Saturday. / Korea Times

