Meeting Report: Workshop for Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation

28-29 August 2024

Holiday Inn Incheon Songdo, Republic of Korea

Executive Summary

The Workshop on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation was held on 28-29 August 2024 in Incheon, Republic of Korea, attended by 61 participants. This was the first such workshop since 2017 and aimed to review the conservation projects of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) while planning future strategies focused on transboundary ecological connectivity and nature conservation in North-East Asia.

The workshop reviewed both past and current projects, conducting deep-dive discussions on thematic areas, specifically big cats and migratory birds. These discussions resulted in a set of recommendations that will inform the new NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026–2030. In addition, specific recommendations were concluded for the new migratory birds project, providing a roadmap for its implementation.

Key Outcomes

Overview

The review of NEASPEC's projects revealed both successes and areas for improvement. Participants recognized the need to strengthen transboundary cooperation for big cats and migratory birds, with a focus on using advanced technologies like AI and drones for monitoring. Another crucial takeaway was the emphasis on community engagement, for example through eco-compensation schemes and capacity building at the local level.

Looking ahead, NEASPEC will consider exploring its knowledge-sharing platform to facilitate more effective collaboration among stakeholders. The platform will be useful for member States and experts for achieving the ambitious biodiversity goals set by the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and ensuring that conservation efforts in North-East Asia under NEASPEC contribute meaningfully to global biodiversity frameworks.

Below are the specific key outcomes on big cats and migratory birds respectively.

Information-sharing platform

A key outcome of the Workshop was concurrence on the need for an enhanced information-sharing platform to facilitate regional conservation efforts. During the discussions, participants emphasized the importance of data exchange among NEASPEC member States to enable better-coordinated actions in monitoring species such as big cats and migratory birds, whose habitats span across borders. This platform would link scientific research with on-the-ground conservation practices, allowing decision-makers to

implement evidence-based policies. By streamlining the sharing of data, research findings, and best practices, the platform would serve as a crucial tool in addressing conservation challenges, particularly those related to climate change, human-wildlife conflicts, and habitat degradation.

Based on the survey conducted during the workshop, workshop participants emphasized the need for a knowledge-sharing platform to enhance collaboration among NEASPEC member States. With a preference for interactive, web-based platforms, publications and presentations were easiest to share, while raw data was seen as the most challenging. Data security and privacy were critical concerns. Lastly, regular meetings, whether online or in person, would effectively facilitate knowledge exchange.

Big Cats

Key discussion points on big cats include:

Amur tiger and Amur leopard conservation:

- Amur Tiger Network:
    - The establishment of a joint platform for monitoring tiger populations across the Russian Federation, China, and Mongolia was a strong recommendation.
- Activities under the platform:
    - Data sharing and technology integration: The development of a joint repository to facilitate the exchange of data on tiger populations and the use of new technologies such as remote sensing and AI-driven monitoring systems.
    - Capacity building: Training programmes focused on equipping young conservationists with modern techniques and knowledge for tiger conservation, ensuring the next generation is prepared to tackle emerging challenges.
    - Information sharing and awareness: Hosting symposiums to share research findings and engaging with international events like Tiger Day, creating avenues to raise global awareness of Amur tiger conservation.

Snow Leopard Conservation:

- Monitoring and research:
    - Use of advanced monitoring techniques such as sign surveys, collaring, and camera traps to track snow leopard populations across transboundary areas in Mongolia and Russia.
    - Conducting genetic research to analyze the genetic diversity and gene flow between snow leopard subpopulations, ensuring that populations remain viable and genetically healthy.
    - Human-wildlife conflict mitigation: A significant focus was placed on strategies to reduce conflicts between local communities and wildlife, particularly snow leopards and ungulates. This includes implementing conflict management practices and promoting coexistence through community engagement.
- Capacity building:
    - Organizing workshops and training programmes for biologists, government officials, and protected area staff, with a target to train at least 200 frontline conservation staff to better manage snow leopard habitats and conflicts.
    - Knowledge-sharing platform: Development of a region-wide platform to share data and best practices among conservationists, enhancing collaboration across national borders.

Alignment with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework:

- Target 4: Focus on halting species extinction, protecting genetic diversity, and managing human-wildlife conflicts.
- Target 20: Prioritize capacity-building, technology transfer, and cooperation for biodiversity conservation at the regional level.

Key Recommendations for the New Migratory Birds Project

1. Strengthen Monitoring and Data Collection:
    - Use of Technology: Leverage AI systems, drones, and wireless cameras for real-time monitoring and to collect more precise data on migratory routes and population trends. This will help improve the understanding of habitat connectivity across borders,
    - Data Sharing Platform: Create a regional platform for data sharing to improve coordination between countries. This will ensure consistent monitoring methods and facilitate the exchange of scientific data across borders.
2. Mitigate Impacts from Energy Infrastructure and Agriculture:
    - Energy Infrastructure: Assess the impacts of solar and wind energy infrastructure on migratory birds, focusing on habitat loss, migration route changes, and risks like bird collisions with wind turbines. The study should recommend mitigation strategies, such as rerouting power lines, using radar systems on wind turbines, and adaptive management measures.
    - Agriculture: Examine the effects of agricultural activities, such as the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and land reclamation, on migratory bird habitats. Promote eco-friendly farming practices and agro-products to minimize habitat destruction and ensure sustainable land use.
3. Community Engagement and Capacity Building:
    - Eco-compensation Schemes: Implement economic incentives, such as eco-compensation for farmers and landowners, to encourage practices that protect migratory bird habitats. These schemes can help reconcile land use with biodiversity conservation.
    - Engage Local Communities: Involve Indigenous and Local Communities (IPLCs) by integrating their traditional knowledge into conservation strategies. This will empower local communities to actively participate in and benefit from conservation efforts.
    - Capacity Building: Conduct training and capacity-building activities aimed at empowering women and youth, ensuring their participation in the monitoring, management, and decision-making processes related to migratory bird conservation.
4. Promote Transboundary Cooperation:
    - International Partnerships: Strengthen transboundary cooperation among the NEASPEC member states (China, DPR Korea, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, and the Russian

Federation). This involves coordinated efforts for research, fieldwork, and policy harmonization to ensure habitat connectivity across borders.

- Alignment with Global Frameworks: Ensure the project aligns with international conventions such as the Ramsar Convention, Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KMGBF) to strengthen global and regional conservation efforts.

5. Focus on Gender and Inclusivity:

    - Gender-sensitive Approaches: Ensure that all project activities, including capacity-building and community engagement, incorporate gender-sensitive strategies. This includes promoting equal participation of women in the conservation process and addressing gender-specific roles in biodiversity management.

Strategic Planning for 2026-2030

During the workshop, participants discussed NEASPEC's strategic direction for 2026-2030, focusing on enhancing knowledge-sharing platforms and capacity-building programmes to strengthen regional conservation efforts. The goal is to improve coordination among stakeholders, facilitate data sharing, and bridge the gap between research and policy implementation. Training workshops and technical seminars were recommended to equip young scientists and local communities with the necessary skills, particularly in advanced technologies like AI and drone monitoring.

The session also highlighted emerging issues that require priority attention:

- Shifts in migratory patterns and earlier migration timings due to climate change, necessitating updated migration models and adaptive conservation measures.
- The growing threat of avian influenza, calling for stronger biosecurity measures and surveillance systems at key migratory sites.

Aligning NEASPEC's strategy with global frameworks, such as the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the Convention on Migratory Species, will ensure that the region's efforts contribute to international biodiversity goals.

Proceedings of the workshop

Opening Session

Mr. Ganbold Baasanjav, Head of the ESCAP East and North-East Asia (ENEA) Office, opened the Workshop on Nature Conservation and Biodiversity for Transboundary Cooperation, which brought together diverse stakeholders including previous and future NEASPEC project experts. In his remarks, Mr. Ganbold emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in addressing North-East Asia's shared environmental challenges and highlighted NEASPEC's role in fostering cross-border collaboration to protect key species, including Amur tigers, snow leopards, and migratory birds.

Ms. Jennifer George, Chief Executive of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), delivered a keynote on the importance of conserving flyway habitats for migratory birds. She pointed out that North-East Asia is home to many key wetlands crucial for migratory species, linking the workshop's efforts to broader international commitments under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) and the Ramsar Convention.

Session 1. (Plenary) Progress on policies and programmes for promoting transboundary environmental cooperation in North-East Asia

Mr. Moon-Hyun Shin from the National Institute of Ecology (NIE) elaborated on Korea's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs), showing how Korea's efforts under the KMGBF serve as a model for integrating global biodiversity targets into national frameworks.

Mr. Kazuhiko Seriu, Associate Environmental Affairs Officer and Ms. Mi-jin Lee, Research Assistant at ESCAP presented an overview of the NEASPEC Nature Conservation Strategy, explaining how this strategy should align with international biodiversity goals. They highlighted the achievements and lessons learned from previous NEASPEC projects, particularly in fostering transboundary cooperation for endangered species, namely six flagship species under NEASPEC.

Dr. Yury Darman, Senior Researcher, Pacific Geographical Institute, Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Science provided insights into the international cooperation efforts for the conservation of Amur leopards and tigers in Russia, focusing on the Land of the Leopard National Park. He highlighted the critical role of transboundary protected areas, particularly those linking Russia and China, in safeguarding these endangered species. Dr. Darman emphasized the success of ecological corridors, which allow for improved habitat connectivity and gene flow between populations. His presentation also addressed the challenges of maintaining effective cross-border collaboration and the importance of continued data sharing and joint monitoring programmes between Russia and China.

Dr. Bernhard Seliger, Representative, Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea Office discussed the conservation efforts in the Rason region of the DPRK, where his foundation has been actively involved since 2009. He shared results from the Rason Summer Bird Survey, which recorded more than 125 bird species, including several endangered and newly identified species. Dr. Seliger highlighted the challenges faced in the region, particularly the need for effective reedbed management and addressing the impacts of climate change on wetland ecosystems. He also emphasized the potential for eco-tourism in Rason, which could support both conservation efforts and local economic development through international partnerships.

Dr. Jeong Eun (Anya) Lim, Senior Researcher at the Research Center for Endangered Species highlighted the importance of fostering collaboration and information exchange among conservation stakeholders. The platform aims to bridge gaps between researchers, policymakers, and practitioners by offering a centralized repository for scientific research, best practices, and case studies. She also identified barriers to knowledge sharing, such as cultural differences, language issues, and technological constraints, and discussed strategies for overcoming these challenges to improve conservation outcomes in North-East Asia.

Session 2.1: Conservation of Big Feline Species

The session on big feline species conservation, led by Dr. Jeong Eun (Anya) Lim and Ms. Mi-Jin Lee, provided a comprehensive review of current conservation strategies and set the stage for future actions aimed at protecting Amur tigers, leopards, and snow leopards in North-East Asia. Participants also updated on their recent activities that are relevant to NEASPEC. Their presentations are available at https://neaspec.org/content/workshop-nature-conservation-and-biodiversity-transboundary-cooperation

Session 2.2: Conservation of Migratory Birds

The session on migratory birds' conservation, moderated by Dr. Lyu Cai and Mr. Kazuhiko Seriu, explored strategies to strengthen the conservation of migratory species in North-East Asia. The session emphasized the importance of transboundary cooperation, advanced monitoring technologies, and community engagement. Participants also updated on their recent activities that are relevant to NEASPEC. Their presentations are available at https://neaspec.org/content/workshop-nature-conservation-and-biodiversity-transboundary-cooperation

Roundtable: Strategic Planning for 2026-2030

Dr. Jeong Eun Lim and Mr. Kazuhiko Seriu led the roundtable discussion, which centered on shaping NEASPEC's strategic plan for 2026-2030. **Ms. Karen Grace C. Ochavo, an Environment Officer from the Asian Development Bank (ADB)**, discussed the role of multilateral development banks in financing conservation projects. She outlined ADB's commitment to mobilizing innovative financing mechanisms, including nature-based solutions and green bonds, to support large-scale conservation efforts.

Vivian Fu from WWF Hong Kong spoke about the role of Communication, Education, Participation, and Awareness (CEPA) in fostering public engagement with conservation efforts. She shared WWF's experience in building local capacities through wetland management training and community-based conservation projects, which have trained over 5,000 people in East Asia. Ms. Fu also stressed the importance of behavioral change, particularly in engaging younger generations and local communities, to ensure the sustainability of conservation initiatives.

The roundtable concluded with participants agreeing on the importance of knowledge-sharing platforms. These platforms would enhance collaboration among scientists, policymakers, and local stakeholders, enabling the exchange of data and best practices. The discussion also highlighted the need to align NEASPEC's future projects with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework to address emerging conservation challenges such as climate change, habitat loss, and biodiversity funding gaps.

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