

## **WWF Germany / Wadden Sea Office (WWF) & The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS)**

### **Report on 2016 EU-China NGO Twinning Program**

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#### ***Brief description of exchange purpose/projects (max 100 words)***

Exchange Topic - Environmental education and awareness raising as critical factors for long term conservation of coastal wetlands with a special focus on coastal birds

The main objective of the exchange was to promote the protection of coastal wetlands by sharing ideas, approaches and practices on bird-related education and awareness activities. As major stopping sites along the East Atlantic respectively East Asian Australasian Flyway, both the Wadden Sea and Yellow Sea are of critical importance for millions of migratory birds. The exchange provided insight into each others work in a local, regional and international context, first-hand nature experience and excellent networking opportunities, that lay a basis for a long-term mutual involvement in conservation of wetlands along the worldwide flyways of coastal birds.

#### **Name of EU Exchange Fellow, Organization, City, Country**

Anja Szczesinski, WWF Germany - Wadden Sea Office, Husum, Germany

13.09. – 13.10.17, Hong Kong, Southern China & Yellow Sea Region

#### ***Introduction (Objectives, expectations)***

Although some 10.000 km apart, the European Wadden Sea and the Asian Yellow Sea region have a lot in common:

Both are trans-boundary nature areas with 3 countries sharing a common natural heritage. In case of the Wadden Sea this is Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands. Around the Yellow Sea this is China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea.

Both regions serve as vital stopping sites for migratory birds on the East Atlantic respectively Asian Austral-Asian Flyway of coastal birds. In both regions, flyway-partnership programs - the

Flyway Initiative in the Wadden Sea and the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership in the Yellow Sea – engage in flyway-wide network-cooperation.

And both regions engage in the UNESCO World Heritage Convention: Since Denmark joined the former German-Dutch World Heritage Site in 2014, the entire Wadden Sea is a trans-boundary UNESCO World Heritage Site. In the Yellow Sea region, there are both Chinese and Korean initiatives to nominate the respective shares as World Heritage Site, hitherto in national approaches, though.

When I first read about the EU China NGO Twinning Program I immediately thought that this would be a great opportunity for cooperation with a Chinese NGO focusing on nature conservation around the Yellow Sea. I had already been engaged in a Memorandum of Understanding between the European Wadden Sea and South Korea for some years and new about the importance of the Yellow Sea as vital stopping place for migratory birds along the East Asian Australasian Flyway. Colleagues of the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership brought me in touch with Vivian Fu from the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society and we quickly realized that our work for conservation of wetlands along important flyways has much in common and that we would be able to learn a lot from each other. I expected the exchange to be a vivid, inspiring and motivating experience with the chance to establish new networks and long-term relationships.

### **Activities**

Networking with numerous organisations and visits to various sites constituted the main activities during my stay in Hong Kong and China. From non-governmental awareness initiatives, state-run visitor centres and interpretation programs to private approaches to education for sustainability – a broad range of nature experience and education offers provided excellent insight, interesting sharing and valuable learning.

Against the background of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society's trans-boundary engagement in conservation, the geographical scope of the activities ranged from Hong Kong via Southern China to the Yellow Sea region.

### **Excerpt of the detailed work plan in Hong Kong and China**

Site visits to

- Mai Po & Long Valley: wetland conservation, environmental education & rural development projects of HKBWS and WWF Hong Kong
- Hong Kong Wetland Park: state-run education, conservation and tourism; experiencing & sharing of education and visitor information activities
- Kadoori Farm & Botanic Garden: private initiative for nature education, sustainable farming & holistic education; insight into education, wildlife rescue and conservation activities
- Hong Kong Ocean Park and Hong Kong Ocean Park Conservation Foundation: comprehensive insight into conservation and education activities; presentation of Wadden Sea education in sharing session for educationalists

- Joining local activities of SEE (Society of Entrepreneurs & Ecology) & NGO fair at Xiamen wetland park
- Visit to Minjiang Wetland Centre; bird count in Minjiang estuary & sharing of education and eco-tourism experience with Fuzhou Birdwatching Society
- Meeting with Guangzhou Nature Association & sharing of school-related environmental education activities
- Meeting EcoAction NGO & academics involved in Yellow Sea conservation and World Heritage nomination, sharing of experiences from Wadden Sea
- Participation in bird survey at roosting site of Spoon-Billed Sandpipers in Jiangsu Province
- Meeting with WWF China and visit to Chongming Dongtang Nature Reserve

A joint visit to the Republic of Korea with the opportunity to participate and contribute to a workshop on training for and management of UNESCO sites and the chance to meet WWF Korea as well as the East Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership completed the activities during my stay in Asia.

### ***Outcome and Impact***

The site visits and sharing sessions provided profound insight into the local, regional and national situations as well as into the existing transnational activities.

I have seen several remarkable initiatives of nature conservation and awareness raising activities and was impressed by the professional engagement of local NGOs, foundations and scientists. It was encouraging to see that there are - in an environment of rapid growth and economic development – also concern about and initiatives for nature, biodiversity and sustainability.

The economic pressure and the political situation around the Yellow Sea are certainly huge challenges for a large-scale and trans-boundary protection as it has been achieved in the Wadden Sea over the last decades. But the many local and regional initiatives for conservation and the ambition of both the Chinese and South Korean government to nominate parts of the Yellow Sea coast as World Heritage Sites certainly constitute a promising basis for an increasing awareness of and responsibility for the protection of this precious nature area.

Spotting the Spoon-billed Sandpiper at the coast of Rudong was definitely the most impressive experience of my trip. This critically endangered species not only symbolizes the beauty and value of biodiversity, but also the efforts needed to protect it along with all the other species and their habitats along the entire flyway. Having had the chance to see these tiny birds foraging and resting is not only a huge privilege, but also a strong motivation to further engage in the international cooperation on the protection of wetlands worldwide.

### ***Future Plans and Sustainability of the Partnership***

The contacts and experience made during the exchange will certainly last way beyond the actual exchange. Keeping each other informed about new developments, sharing new resources, asking for advice or feedback, recommending each other as experts for symposia, etc. or inviting each other to workshops are only a few synergies.

The exchange provided valuable ideas for educational resources that can be jointly developed to link the flyways in interesting and inspiring stories and thus contribute to an increased public

awareness and support for international conservation efforts.

Designing a common poster of the two flyways and developing a sticker book featuring habitats and creatures of the Wadden Sea as well as Yellow Sea are two concrete ideas that will be further investigated. Also the possibilities for jointly arranging a study tour to the Wadden Sea with a focus on World Heritage education and interpretation for Chinese and Korean NGOs engaged in Yellow Sea conservation will be explored.

Altogether the exchange program has contributed to and the follow-up activities certainly will provide further opportunities to raise the profile and quality of environmental education and wetland conservation on a global scale.

## **Fu Wing Kan Vivian, The Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, Hong Kong, China**

Dates and location of exchange in Europe

Dates: 15.6.2017 – 15.7.2017

Location: Husum, Germany (mainly, also included other parts of Wadden Sea in Denmark and the Netherland.

### ***Introduction (Objectives, expectations)***

As both of our work focus wetland and wildlife conservation, especially flyways of migratory birds, I found that our work has a very high similarity. Both of us are concerned with coastal wetland ecosystems, and how to balance the conservation of wildlife and the economic development of the coastal regions. The protection of the Wadden Sea has a history of over 50 years, while in the Asian Yellow Sea region - thousands of kilometres away - the awareness of the importance of coastal wetlands has only been a topic in the recent decade. Therefore, it is a great opportunity for learning about effective conservation of coastal wetlands on a trilateral (international) scale and in a sustainable manner. As my work and my organization operates more on a grass-root level, I was sure that with the expertise of my partner there would be a lot of inspiration from the exchange visit to the Wadden Sea region, covering areas of wildlife conservation work including environmental education, bird monitoring and habitat management. And more importantly, the inspiration will generate more interaction between the two regions in the future.

### ***Activities***

I would like to divide the exchange into two parts: experiencing and networking. I gained a lot of hands-on experience on ecotourism and environmental education through visiting different Wadden Sea partners and visitor centres. And on the other hand, meetings with different partners allowed me to build networks with relevant players on different aspects such as design of volunteer programmes, policy and advocacy, which would be very helpful for establishing a beneficial and efficient system of conservation of intertidal wetlands in the

Yellow Sea Region. The activities were not confined to Germany, but also covered Denmark and the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea region, providing a complete scope of understanding of this international cooperation.

Activities carried out were:

1) Experiencing

- Visiting a total of 13 Wadden Sea visitor centres in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands
- Participation in a National Park Ranger-guided “World Heritage Discovery Cruise”
- Educational activities within the framework of the “Junior Ranger”-program
- Joining one of the popular Wadden Sea walks: a guided tour on the mudflats to Hallig Südfall
- Waterbird surveys at different locations in the German, Danish and Dutch Wadden Sea

2) Networking and meetings

- Visit to the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat in Wilhelmshaven, introduction to the Trilateral Cooperation on the protection of the Wadden Sea as well as the UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage coordination and Flyway Initiative
- Joint meeting of WWF and Schutzstation Wattenmeer
- Meeting with staff members and the director of the Wadden Sea National Park of Denmark, and with leading people of Wadden Sea conservation from the Netherlands.



Fig. 1. A 7-hour mudflat walk to a hallig



Fig. 2. Joining a waterbird survey at the Wadden Sea



Fig. 3a&b. (a) Nature interpretation on the “World Heritage Discovery Cruise”, (b) Nature education with school children.



Fig. 4. Meeting at the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat



Fig. 5. Meeting with Wadden Sea National Park staff

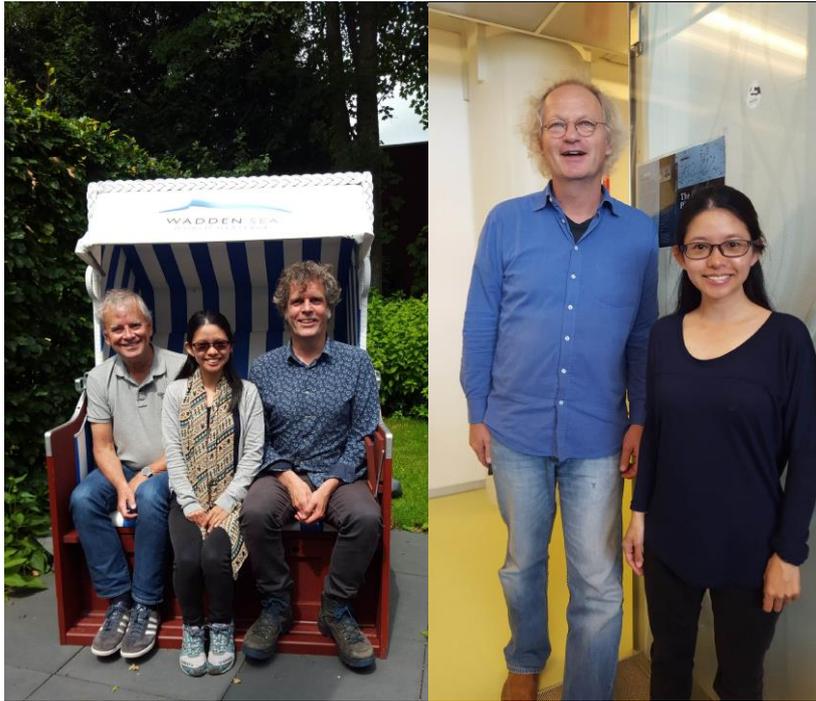


Fig. 6 a & b. (a) Meeting with Jens Enemark, 'founder' of the Wadden Sea World Heritage. (b) meeting with Prof. Theunis Piersma, the leading academic on study of waterbirds.

### ***Outcome and Impact***

#### **1) Experiencing**

It was a very inspiring trip to learn about how environmental education is designed and implemented here. I had a chance to explore and meet with people who designed materials, tools and programmes for this purpose. In addition, the scope of audiences are not restricted to school children, but also cover the general public. I have visited at least 13 visitor centres of the Wadden Sea UNESCO site, joined two volunteer-lead and one professional-guided activities for students and the public respectively. The 13 visitor centres I visited are all different from each other, from the aesthetic Wadden Sea Centre in Denmark to small local visitor centres along the German and Dutch coast which are run by NGOs or National Park administrations. Yet, they are all connected in some way, and synchronized in information delivery and sharing of common resources. The most impressive experience was a 7-hour mudflat walk to a hallig island, a very unique habitat in the Wadden Sea. This allows me to learn from real-life experiences and it is very useful for developing programmes in the future.

#### **2) Networking**

The exchange programme also provided chances for networking and sharing experiences of coastal wetland conservation with other organizations. My well-networked partner, Anja, organized meetings with her collaborators who work towards the sustainable development and conservation of the Wadden Sea. For example, the meeting with the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat provided a lot of insight on how the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Wadden Sea is managed in a trilateral context by coordinating activities between the three countries,



the Netherland, Germany and Denmark. This allowed me to understand how a cooperative system was developed and managed. We have also paid visits to other collaborating Wadden Sea players, such as the Schutzstation Wattenmeer, Vogelbescherming Nederland, and the Wadden Sea National Park of Denmark.

**For more information, please contact Stiftung Asienhaus-China Program and request access to in-depth twinning reports.**