

WETLAND MANAGEMENT AND WATERBIRD CONSERVATION IN MONGOL DAGUUR STRICTLY PROTECTED AREA AND THE BUFFER ZONE, MONGOLIA

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Wetlands are one of the most important habitats for water birds. My research focused on the Mongol Daguur Strictly Protected Area (SPA) located in northeastern Mongolia. This area is characterised as a vast temperate grassland steppe, with low mountains and rolling hills and with numerous small and medium sized steppe lakes and wetlands. (Nyambayar, 2011). It is an important stopover and breeding area for the Swan goose, six species of cranes and many wetland dependent bird species in Northeast Asia (Birdlife international, 2005).

Recently, the effects of global warming (drought), steppe fire, livestock overgrazing, mining, human disturbance and livestock have had a negative impact on the region, especially habitat, population sizes, and breeding activities of birds. (Tseveenmyadag, 2002; Goroshko, 2007; Bradter, 2007; Gombobaatar, 2011). However, the main problems are the lack of finance and properly trained human resources which prevent the appropriate protection of the wetland ecosystem in Eastern Mongolia. The objectives of my research were to elucidate the natural resource utilization by local people and identify the threats to water birds caused by local people. Through the identification of these problems, I will offer recommendations on how local people and their knowledge can help conserve the wetlands and water birds in this area.

My study was based on primary and secondary data collection. The primary data was collected by conducting a semi structured questionnaire survey on the herders living near lakes and river basins (54 HHs) and herders living far from the wetlands in the Mongol Daguur area (20 HHs). As there was no available population census and location data, I tried to visit all the summer settlements in the selected areas. In addition, open-ended interviews to key informants from relevant government and non- government organizations were also conducted.

While livestock numbers near the lakes have increased compared to 2011, 80% of the respondents indicated that fire, drought and overgrazing are the main challenges in this area. During the survey I observed that the herder's summer camp movement pattern to the lakes overlaps the waterbird breeding period.

Future research aims to analyze household economic activity, herding history and perception of the Protected Areas and the environment. These research results may provide effective recommendations for improving wetland conservation and protected area management in this area.

Keywords: wetland management, water bird conservation, biodiversity, Mongol Daguur strictly protected area, local people