Bird Species in Rice Paddy Areas, Their Conservation, and Challenges

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I participated in the activity as a collaborator from the standpoint of ornithology and conservation ornithology in the field of natural science. Paddy fields are used by various birds as a place for living and breeding. Meanwhile, there have been studies on what type of paddy environment is desirable from the standpoint of environmental conservation, and the environmental conservation activities have been practiced in many places.

This article overviews birds depending on the paddy environment, and reports the conservation activities for the bird species in rice paddy areas including the case examples conducted in Katano-Kamoike in Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture and in Toyota City, Aichi Prefecture in which I have been engaged, describing also their challenges.

Bird species in rice paddy areas can be classified into four types according to the seasons: summer birds such as swallows which come to Japan in spring, breed here, and return to the south in autumn; winter birds such as duck-family birds which come from the north to the south in autumn, pass the winter in Japan, and return to the north in the early spring; migratory birds such as snipe- and plover-family birds which go to the north in spring, and go to the south in autumn, passing through Japan; and resident birds such as sparrows which are observed in paddy fields and their surroundings throughout the year. To preserve the bird species in rice paddy areas, the following measures have been taken: 1. Regulation of hunting, 2. Feeding, 3. Improvement of paddy environment (winter-flooded paddy fields), and 4. Registration to the Ramsar Convention.

Katano-Kamoike in Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture is one of the nation's most popular stopovers for water birds, where the largest number of white-fronted geese and bean geese pass the winter in the western area from Hokuriku, and ducks from Anas platyrhynchos to Anas formosa which is rare in Japan also visit. However, there have been fewer and fewer ducks using the Kamoike (duck pond) as a wintering place in recent years. Therefore, research has been conducted on the paddy environment preferred by wintering ducks as their feeding habitat and the range of feeding activity of ducks, and the method of winter-flooded paddy fields has been practiced.

The project "Forest Creation for Grey-Faced Buzzard" has been promoted in the Nature Observation Forest in Toyota City by various sectors including the government, NGOs, volunteers,
researchers, etc. under the coordination of the rangers of the Wild Bird Society of Japan. It develops Satoyama conservation activities with the Grey-Faced Buzzard as the target of conservation.

For the conservation of bird species in rice paddy areas, the following challenges exist: response to changes in the paddy environment such as abandoned paddy fields, idle paddy fields, dried paddy field, etc., and the environmental conservation for breeding, wintering, and stopover places for birds.

For reference, see "Ramsar COP 10 Resolution X. 31 (Paddy Resolution)".

Key words: Paddy field, bird species in rice paddy areas, winter-flooded paddy field, bird conservation, hunting