

# NEWSLETTER No.2

## IUCN/SSC X<sup>th</sup> International Otter Colloquium

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### OSG Chairman Jim Conroy Visits Hwacheon and KORC Oct. 13-15, 2006

As OSG chairman, Jim Conroy paid an official visit to Hwacheon County and the Korean Otter Research Center (KORC) to attend the Grand Festival of Peace and Reconciliation of Hwacheon County this past October. It was his first visit to Korea. This was a peace-seeking festival hosted by Hwacheon County, and the DMZ Otter Project (DOP), DMZ Society and Peace Charter were its three main themes. Mr. Conroy arrived in Hwacheon on Oct. 13<sup>th</sup>, and began the official schedule attending the "DMZ Peace Pilgrimage" which visited Chilsung Observatory, Lake Paro, the Peace Dam, and Ojak Bridge on the south boundary of the DMZ. These sites are historical places which tell us much about the past and present of the Korean Peninsula. The field tour gave people from abroad a better understanding of the DMZ and the county's efforts to redefine it as a site to promote world peace and wildlife conservation.

On October 14<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Conroy and his wife Ann attended a DMZ Symposium, arts festival, and the DOP and DMZ Society inauguration ceremony held at the venue of the 10<sup>th</sup> IOC, where they shared ideas with peace delegates and signed the DMZ Society Charter as charter members. Since the 10<sup>th</sup> IOC Committee has designated the otter as Peace Ambassador of Korea, world peace activists also showed a great deal of interest in the DOP,

understanding that not only humans but also otters can act as a peacemakers here in the DMZ.

On October 15<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Conroy and Ann visited KORC and toured the facilities including its new otter shelter. Dr. Han, host and organizer of the 10<sup>th</sup> IOC, discussed with Mr. Conroy what needs to be done and how to organize things for a successful IOC. Considering the county's geographical location and surroundings, Mr. Conroy made several practical suggestions. He and his wife also met the county mayor, Mr. Jeong, Gap-Cheol at his office. The mayor feels very honored to be a host of the 10<sup>th</sup> IOC in Hwacheon, and gives it his full support. Conroys, Dr. Han and Mayor Jeong all promised wholehearted cooperation for a successful IOC next year.



Conroys and Dr. Han in Hwacheon's Civilian Control Zone, buffer to the demilitarized zone (DMZ)

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### DMZ Otter Project Launched Oct. 14, 2006

On Oct. 14, 2006, Hwacheon County launched the DMZ Otter Project with hopes to restore otter populations in the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) and its buffer area and to collaborate with North Korean researchers on otter surveys as a peace-seeking project. The Organizing Committee of the 10<sup>th</sup> IOC designated the otter as Peace Ambassador of Korea.



The Mayor's congratulatory address

#### **- Background**

In 1986, North Korea announced construction of the Imnam Dam, also called the Kumgansan Dam, to prevent flooding and reserve water. This was considered a threat by the South, however, as it claimed that the North could potentially flood Seoul, its capital, by releasing the dam's waters. Driven by fear, the South began construction of a counter-

dam called the Peace Dam in 1987.

The flow of the North Han River downstream from the Imnam Dam has now been reduced by 70%. This resulted from North Korea's construction of a 45 km-long diversion tunnel to reverse the flow of the river's water above the dam from south to north and east toward the East Sea, using it to generate electricity along the way. The only tributary joining the North Han River in the 10 km below the Imnam Dam and above the DMZ is Kumsungchon, a small stream 72.3 km in length. The Peace Dam lies 9 km south of the DMZ at the southern limit of the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ). It is in this area between the two dams that the DOP intends to focus its efforts.

The reduced water flow has caused considerable ecological disturbance to the river's ecosystem, and serious problems have arisen. The river cannot sustain the fish populations it once did, and otters, at the top of food chain, are suffering the consequences. The otter population has dramatically decreased in the area. While studying habitat conditions including food supply issues in the DMZ and CCZ, we hope to collaborate with the North in consideration of restoring the North Han River's natural flow. We believe that the efforts to restore otter populations will work to benefit the entire ecosystem of the DMZ, CCZ and beyond.

#### **- Future plans**

In the long run, the DOP is not only for otters but for all nature in the DMZ. Working with otters, we

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hope to restore the DMZ's ecological integrity along the North Han River and eventually to achieve our objective: a peace park co-founded with North Korea in the DMZ, ultimately to become a national park of a reunified Korea. Making it happen will require intensive input from both within and outside the peninsula, taking one step at a time.



Dr. Han's presentation

### Otter Shelter Opening and Otter Release to Wild on Oct. 28, 2006

#### - Otter Shwimt'au

The Korean Otter Research Center has officially opened the only otter rehabilitation facility of Korea, called Otter Shwimt'au, to the public with the full support of Hwacheon County. Many people of all walks of life including national government officials attended the ceremony on October 28, and celebrated this significant contribution to otter

conservation. National and local media broadcast the event, helping to raise public awareness of the Otter Shwimt'au's role in otter conservation and the opportunity it offers the public to observe wild otters.

The Otter Shwimt'au was built on 7,000 square feet of land in July, 2006. The site consists of three ponds, two inter-connected dens with each pond, and an observation deck. Otters catch live fish and play freely in the well-designed ponds and surrounding vegetation. There is also electric fencing around the perimeter of the shelter as a security measure.

The otter observation deck is high enough to look down on the ponds below and allows visitors to watch otters without disturbing them. The ponds and dens are equipped with closed-circuit television cameras which remotely monitor and record the otters' activities 24 hours/day.



Opening ceremony

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An overall view of *Otter Shwimt'au*

### **- Back to the Wild**

After the opening ceremony, one of the rescued otters which had been living at the otter facility for several months was released back to the wild in the Civilian Control Zone (CCZ), buffer zone to the DMZ. The otter is named Han-gang-ee, representing the Han River (running north to south through the Korean Peninsula) and reunification of the two Koreas as a Peace Ambassador. The release is part of the DMZ Otter Project to restore the otter population in the DMZ and surrounding areas through intensive ecological otter research.

Guided by the army, attendants moved to the release site along the North Han River in the CCZ. After congratulatory remarks by visiting dignitaries, Han-gang-ee was released into the river in hopes he will flourish and bring peace to the two Koreas. He had been implanted with a radio transmitter, and we are now tracking his movements on a regular basis. It is our hope we may gain the cooperation of North Korean researchers both in assessing the

status of the otter habitat and population across the DMZ and in tracking the movements of Han-gang-ee and other otters to be released in the future, should they travel to the North. In this way we hope to build relationships and establish trust across the border, contributing to a larger and lasting peace.

Results of our tracking studies thus far will be presented at next fall's 10<sup>th</sup> IOC in Hwacheon.



Ready to release an otter



The released otter, Han-gang-ee

### **Special Notice**

**The official website of the 10<sup>th</sup> IOC will be fully working next January, so please keep an eye on it.**