First Discovery of European White Storks in Korea

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A brace of European white stork (Ciconia ciconia ciconia) was observed for the first time in Korea, staying in Mangyeonggang basin, Hwapo-ri, Jellabuk-do, from Sept. 2008. The Mangyeonggang (river) basin was an intertidal mudflat and is turning into a salty grassland in the process of the Saemangeum reclamation project now underway. The birds in Picture 1 are resting on a mudflat in the river made by high and low tides.

The pair repeat hunting and resting in an area within the radius of 4~5 km. Their feather looks rougher compared with wild birds. It seems they are still young or not experienced in preening feather. Some suggest they have escaped from a zoo, because Korea is too far away from Europe to consider them to have lost their way. On the other hand, some think they are wild birds because their behaviors of hunting and warning in the wild are naturally developed rather than trained in a zoo.

The appearance of the European white storks in Korea, through whatever route, interests Koreans who have loved white storks since long time ago.

In Korea, a white stork (Ciconia boyciana) means a large, auspicious bird, and represents longevity, happiness, noble man, wealthiness, eternal youth, and noble spirit.

Until the liberation from Japanese Imperial rule in 1945, white storks were native birds commonly found living in Hwanghae-do and Chungcheongbuk-do regions. Most of them were killed in the Korean War and poached in the 1960s. The male stork of the last brace in Eumseong, Chungcheongbuk-do, was poached in April, 1974, thus, the female failed to breed.

White storks were designated as a natural monument No. 199, in 1968 for protection. The European white storks found last September, Family Ciconiidae under Order Ciconiiformes, are almost the same as the migratory white storks, except they are a little smaller in size. They are expected to stay in Korea for some time as they seem to have no problem in flying and eating.

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