

BHS Amphibian Ladders Going Global!

Amphibian ladders invented right here in the UK are attracting attention far and wide – now Republic of Korea is trialing the technology in deadly concrete rice field trenches.

In recent years concrete trenches have been appearing all over RoK in an effort to “improve” drainage and irrigation of paddy fields. It seems though that no impact study was carried out, as the trenches are deadly traps for thousands of amphibians and other small animals. The trenches surround the paddy fields on all sides, meaning that the previously perfect summer breeding grounds for many of the amphibian species that use them are now cut off from the surrounding habitat.

The trenches are impassable to amphibians and entire populations are at risk of falling into them, with no means of escape. Clearly the problem has since been realised as some of the concrete sections in certain areas have been replaced with a design which includes an in-built “staircase”. However it costs thousands of dollars per section to carry out the modification, which many authorities cannot afford.

Dr. Nial Moores, director of Birds Korea, an NGO concerned with the conservation of birds and their habitats in the region first recognised the problem in 2016. He found hundreds of black spotted pond frogs trapped in a trench on Baengnyeong Island. As fast as he could rescue them, more were falling in. This sparked an initiative on his part to research the issue and through the powers of the internet, came across our amphibian ladder, currently supplied exclusively by the British Herpetological Society.

At Dr. Moores’ invitation, Trevor Rose of the British Herpetological Society and Friends of Angus Herpetofauna traveled to RoK and spent eight days meeting with influential government officials and land owners, demonstrating ladder manufacture and installing a small number of trial ladders at two sites, one on Baengnyeong Island and one at Yeoncheon in the north of the mainland.

Trevor said “It’s heart-breaking to see such huge numbers of frogs dying in this way. There’s literally no safe passage from terrestrial foraging and hibernation sites to breeding grounds without encountering these death traps.”

“There are thousands of kilometres of these concrete trenches all over RoK and it will take many thousands of ladders to safeguard them. We are hopeful in the long term that these trenches will be removed and the traditional dug-out drainage ditches reinstated, which provide good habitat rather than destroy it”.

He continued “Losing so many frog populations will have a devastating effect on biodiversity, removing a natural predator of rice field pests and an important food source of higher predators such as birds, fish, reptiles and mammals. Protecting these frogs in the long term can only have a positive effect on the entire ecosystem”.

See images in our gallery and read more on this subject with more images in Dr. Nial Moores’ blog at: <http://www.birdskoreablog.org/?p=22925>