

# Wetlands protection transforming Shanxi

Sustainable development and wide-ranging government schemes highlight unique features of area's natural habitats and biodiversity



By YUAN SHENGGAO

With average annual precipitation of about 500 millimeters, Shanxi is by no means a humid region. However, this is not a province short of wetlands, especially in recent years.

Wetland areas are one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, playing a crucial role in environmental protection, biodiversity and the well-being of humans.

Latest statistics show that Shanxi is home to more than 220,000 hectares of wetlands, accounting for about 1.4 percent of its land area and covering rivers, lakes, forest swamps, shrub swamps, swamp meadows, mud flats and marshes.

The wetlands in Shanxi are a gift from nature, especially along the Yellow River, its tributaries within the province and other rivers flowing to Bohai Bay. On the other hand, Shanxi's efforts in environmental protection are another reason contributing to the sustained growth of wetlands in recent years.

In Youyu at the northwestern tip of

Shanxi, an establishment called Cangtuo River National Wetland Park, which features lush forests, grass and meandering streams and brooks, counters the area's reputation as the most arid county in the province.

The park was added to the national wetland list in January 2021, as an endorsement of the county's decades of efforts in environmental protection.

Youyu used to be a drought-plagued landmass where the living conditions of residents were threatened by sandstorms. Back in the 1940s and 1950s, the greening rate there was only about 0.3 percent.

In the early 1950s, the local government began to implement a greening campaign to improve the ecological environment. Since then, government officials, together with forestry technicians and workers, as well as local farmers, have spared no effort in planting trees.

Over the past seven decades, more than 110,000 hectares of trees have been planted in the county, bringing its forest coverage to about 57 percent at this time. Now the previously barren land has been converted to an "oasis along the Great Wall", said a local official.

The official added that the increase in vegetation coverage has resulted in a steady increase of runoff volume of rivers, leading to the formation of the

wetland park in Youyu.

Today, the Cangtuo River National Wetland Park has become not only a major tourist destination in Youyu, but also an ideal habitat for birds and other animals. Local bird watchers reported that rare birds such as the Mandarin duck, pond heron and great bustard have been spotted.

Throughout Shanxi, the province is home to 63 wetland parks, including 20 national and 43 provincial wetland parks, as well as three wetland-based nature reserves, according to Wang Zhanqin, chief of the Shanxi Service Center for Nature Reserves.

He said that wetlands are a fragile ecosystem with growth subject to both changes of natural conditions and human activities.

He noted that reclaiming farmlands from wetlands and pollution caused by industrial and household sewage discharge used to be the major challenges to Shanxi's wetland ecosystem over the past century.

But these challenges have been properly addressed as the province has embarked on a path of sustainable development that highlights both growth and environmental protection since the 1990s.

"Our efforts in controlling pollution, returning farmlands to wetlands, increasing water supply and growing wetland vegetation have led to a fundamental improvement of the



The Cangtuo River National Wetland Park is an epitome of Youyu county's efforts in environmental protection. HE CHAOSHAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

wetland ecosystem," Wang said. "This features the steady increase of wetland area and vegetation coverage, improved water quality and increased biodiversity."

The Shanxi Provincial Regulation on the Protection of Wetlands took effect on June 1, marking a new milestone for wetland protection in the framework of the rule of law.

Wang said Shanxi's next-stage efforts will include expanding the wetland network through scientific planning, and making the wetlands important venues for environmental protection, biodiversity development, scientific research, education and tourism.

The Gucheng National Wetland Park in the city of Yuncheng was the first national wetland park in Shanxi thanks to local authorities' unremitting efforts in helping the ecological recovery of the area.

"During the period from 2018-20, we returned more than 860 hectares of farmlands nearby to the wetland park," said Lu Dapeng, head of the

Gucheng wetland park. "Most of the farmlands were located at the riparian zone of the Xiaolangdi Reservoir, which is the core area of the wetland park."

Xiaolangdi is one of the largest reservoirs along the Yellow River. The wetland park centering on the reservoir has a total area of more than 2,900 hectares.

Zhang Minshe is a nearby resident and a bird protection worker in the park. He said he is happy to see increasing numbers of birds and tourists to this park.

"Thousands of birds can be spotted during the migratory seasons, showing the marked improvement of the ecological environment," Zhang said. "These are also peak seasons for bird-watching tours."

Authorities in Shanxi are also using various occasions and local resources to help the public increase their awareness of wetland protection.

For instance, the local forest and grassland administrations are trying to promote wetland protection

through campaigns centering on the World Wetlands Day, which falls on Feb 2 every year; and the Shanxi Birds-Loving Week in early April.

The wetland parks throughout Shanxi have organized educational and research tours for students to help them understand the wetland ecosystem and the importance of wetland protection.

The Qinhe River Source National Wetland Park in the city of Changzhi is one such destination.

"The park has an educational center for students, allowing them to learn about the formation and development of wetlands in Shanxi and China through multimedia means," said Dong Chao, an official at the wetland park. "Our monitoring center and the animal and plant specimen lab are also open to the students, giving them an idea on water-quality monitoring and biodiversity."

Zhang Liyuan contributed to this story.

## Low-carbon focus drives growth of companies

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Accounting for nearly half of local GDP and creating more than half of local employment opportunities, private businesses in Shanxi are playing an increasingly important role in the province's economic transformation.

Economic transformation is now the most important strategy in this North China province. There is an emphasis on upgrading traditional industries toward efficient and clean production, and fostering emerging industries as new growth engines.

Zhongyang Iron and Steel, based in the county of Zhongyang, is an example of a traditional industry being upgraded.

For low-carbon and cleaner operations, the company is having a dust-removing and discharge-reducing facility constructed at its steelmaking plant.

According to an executive of the company, this is one of its key projects this year.

"Upon the completion of the project, we will see a substantial reduction in waste gas discharge," the executive said. "And the content of dust in emissions will be decreased to 10 milligrams per cubic meter, reaching a super low level."

He said many private businesses in Shanxi are in heavy industries like coal mining and steelmaking.

"We have comparative advantages

in heavy industries and upgrading toward cleaner and more efficient operations is a practical approach to high-quality growth," the executive said.

He said Zhongyang Iron and Steel is also utilizing digital technologies to optimize its production process. It is also recycling to minimize consumption of resources and reduce its footprint on the environment, and developing more value-added and environmentally friendly products.

While manufacturers like Zhongyang are focusing on advanced manufacturing, private companies like Meijin Energy are shifting their operations to emerging industries.

Founded in 1981, Meijin used to be a major coal mining and coking enterprise in Taiyuan. It began to diversify into the hydrogen industry in 2017 and has since developed into one of the major hydrogen producers and hydrogen energy solutions providers in Shanxi.

Its product and service portfolio in the hydrogen industry now includes hydrogen-fueled vehicles, hydrogen storage and hydrogen filling stations.

Meijin's production plant for hydrogen-fueled vehicles began construction in September 2022. With a total investment of 1.8 billion yuan (\$250 million), the facility mainly produces heavy-duty trucks. The first phase of the plant is now operational and can produce 5,000 hydrogen trucks a year.



Zhongyang Iron and Steel is now one of the environmentally friendly producers in Zhongyang county thanks to its focus on low-carbon development. LI LIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Yao Jincheng, vice-president of the company, said that its trucks can travel about 400 kilometers on a full tank of hydrogen. "Its fuel cost is much lower than a diesel truck with similar loading capacity and more importantly, it has zero emissions."

Xiangrui New Energy, a company based in Taiyuan, is another example of how private businesses can stand out in cutting-edge sectors. It is providing digitalized solutions for the allocation of resources between energy producers and consumers.

When electric car drivers in Taiyuan are reminded by the car console that it's time to charge their electric cars, they might take out a smartphone and click on an app icon called Green Electricity. It tells them where cost-effective green electricity charging stations are available nearby. This app was developed by Xiangrui.

Wang Zhengtong, board chairman of Xiangrui, said green electricity generated from hydraulic, wind and solar power is favored by electric

car drivers as it enjoys government subsidies. However, instability in power generation and low utilization efficiency are challenges the green electricity sector needs to address. Xiangrui is among the pioneers in Shanxi to offer solutions to these challenges.

"Using digital technologies, our platform is connected with power plants, power grids, charging stations and end users like drivers," Wang said. "Through the coordination of the platform, the power supply efficiency has been improved among various stakeholders."

Wang said the company's platform is now serving more than 3,000 corporate clients in Shanxi and beyond. Through the platform, the companies involved have provided 5.6 billion kilowatt-hours of green electricity to date, helping users save costs worth 851 million yuan and reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 4.49 million metric tons.

Li Lian, Deng Weiqiang and Yang Wenjun contributed to this story.

## Upgrading campaign boosts rural vitalization

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Wanrong, a county in the Shanxi city of Yuncheng, has become a sample of the province's "beautiful countryside" campaign and a role model in rural vitalization after nearly eight years of development.

It has received numerous honors over the years granted by national and provincial authorities, which include "a typical case for equalized urban and rural public services in China"; "a national demonstration county for clean villages"; "a provincial pilot county for comprehensive improvements in rural living environment and rural vitalization" and "a provincial demonstration county for leisure and rural tourism".

Behind these honors are the local government's efforts to improve the livelihoods of rural residents, which include improving the environment, renovating infrastructure and creating job and business opportunities, according to local officials.

Wang Bin, a resident in Miaojian village, is a witness to these positive changes. "Before 2020, Miaojian was one of the most dilapidated villages in Wanrong, with unrepaired houses and unpleasant environment," Wang recalled. "I moved to the county seat where I bought a new apartment and decided to never return."

But after the completion of a new settlement near the former residential block of the village, he returned in 2020. The settlement was used to house people relocated from their old homes.

The settlement, with new houses for 105 families, was a project funded by both the government and residents.

"There are now clean streets and tidy two-story houses along them," Wang said. "Inside the houses there are everything you can find in the homes of city dwellers — supplies of gas, heat and electricity and flushing toilets. Now I spend more time in this new home than the one in the county seat."



The village of Dongwuzhuang in Wanrong county presents a new look after a major renovation. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wang Peng contributed to this story.

## Xinghuacun Fenjiu dazzles at international show

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Xinghuacun Fenjiu, a renowned white liquor producer in Shanxi province, once again attracted the attention of international buyers with its presence at the Imbibe Live show held in London, the United Kingdom, earlier this month.

Imbibe Live was first held in 2010 and has become the largest alcoholic beverage exhibition in the UK over the past decade. This year's event was held from July 3-4.

The booth of Xinghuacun Fenjiu is a combination of Chinese and Western patterns, which capitalizes on visual elements comprised of traditional Chinese landscapes and modern architecture and elegant design.

The brand's historical association with poetry was highlighted in the decoration of its booth, with the lines of the renowned poem by Du Mu of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) presented on a display that also featured landscape portraits inspired by the poem:



Xinghuacun Fenjiu's representatives introduce liquor products to visitors at the Imbibe Live show. WEN ZHAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"A drizzling rain falls like tears on the Qingming Day.

The traveler's heart is going to break on the way.

Where can a liquor shop be found to drown his dismay?

A cowherd points to the apricot flower village far away."

The brand Xinghuacun is actually named after the poem, where Du described his mood during a trip on Qingming, or Tomb Sweeping Day, in April. In Chinese, Xinghuacun literally means apricot flower village.

While getting a glance into the brand's history and Chinese culture,

many visitors had a taste of the company's liquor and spoke highly of its quality and unique flavor, showing great interest in its traditional distilling technology.

The varieties on show included the company's traditional brands of Zhuyeqing and Fenjiu, as well as the Panama and Silk Road brands designed for Western customers.

The Panama is designed to memorize its earliest but successful attempt to go global on a large scale.

It won a first prize at the Panama Pacific International Exhibition in San Francisco, the United States, in 1915. Since then, Xinghuacun Fenjiu brands have become popular in overseas markets.

Xinghuacun Fenjiu is now among the top three exporters in China's white liquor industry. To date, its products have been sold to more than 60 countries and regions, through its 50-plus overseas dealers and more than 9,000 outlets in foreign countries.