

## **Tidal Flat Environmental Education Curriculum in the Ariake Sea Coastal Area**

Hayakawa, Rumiko<sup>1</sup> Toubai, Sadayoshi<sup>2</sup>

1. WWF Japan, Tokyo, Japan 2. WWF Japan

Ariake Sea is a gulf located in Kyushu, the southern island of Japan, whose unique geographical features have developed numerous tidal flats with high biodiversity including 23 species that are only found within Japan in the Ariake Sea. The conservation value of these areas is highly recognized internationally as the tidal flats play an important role in the protection of migrating shorebirds. The areas provide feeding and roosting sites to replenish shorebirds' energy during migration from the Arctic to South East Asian and Australasian countries. However, appropriate conservation measures are currently not in place to ensure their protection, allowing further development along the coastline and degradation of the environment.

In 2000, as a part of the wetland conservation act, WWF Japan initiated an environmental education project in the Ariake Sea coastal area at Kashima City in Saga prefecture, where one of the important international sites for migrating shorebirds is situated. Under this project, the development and implementation of the educational curriculum for schools and the production of educational materials has been conducted in collaboration with the local community. The curriculum consists of fieldwork, in-class study, and research by students. It encourages interest and promotes their understanding of the ecosystem of tidal flats, its importance in nature, and its significance in their society.

The educational curriculum was initially developed in collaboration with an adviser group, comprising members from the local government, board of education, teachers and NGOs. Support for the modification and expansion of the curriculum continues to be given by the board of education as well as schools in area and support for the implementation comes from local authorities and NGOs. The high level of the local community's involvement in this project has ultimately led to the promotion of conservation and an increase in public awareness of the need for protection of shorebirds and the importance of the tidal flat environment in Kashima. In the foreseeable future, Kashima City aims to join the East Asia–Australasian Shorebirds Reserve Network.

To date, the project has concentrated mainly on the Kashima City area. However, through the distribution of educational materials and conducting a series of workshops, WWF Japan hopes to promote and expand this educational curriculum to other regions along this coastline concentrating on areas with important tidal flats.