



Press Release



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The Ministry of Environment to Protect the Country's Ecosystem through the Registration of Exotic Animals

- Agreement on a pilot program for raccoon registration -

Sejong, March 31 - On March 31, the Ministry of Environment (ME, Minister Han Jeoung Ae) signed an MOU with the Korean Association of Animal Industry and eleven exotic animal cafes that own raccoons on the "raccoon registration pilot program." The agreement outlines the partnership between the public and private sectors to safely and healthily protect and manage raccoons, non-native species that threaten ecosystems. Raccoons of the Procyonidae family are popular for animal displays in Korea because of their adorable appearance. Still, they were designated 'potential risk species'¹ in May 2020 because of their potential to threaten the nation's ecosystem if neglected in domestic habitats.

The Ministry of Environment launched a "raccoon registration pilot program" to avoid negative effects on native biodiversity caused by the missing wild animals. The program will also prevent abandoning wild animals that may occur in the future when the government bans commercial displays involving wild and exotic animals².

¹ If abandoned raccoons are left in the ecosystem, they are likely to have exceptional survival abilities and compete with indigenous species, such as leopard cat, Asian badger, and typical raccoon dog. People can get infected by raccoons, which can cause zoonotic diseases.

² The National Assembly's Environment and Labor Committee is working on a partial amendment of the Wildlife Protection and Management Act (proposed by Congressman No Woong-rae in July 2021)

Microchips³ will be implanted in twenty-eight animals owned by eleven wild animal cafes to prevent abandonment or losses. Owners of exotic animal cafes should register their raccoons by May 31, 2022, manage their raccoons in an environment appropriate to the raccoons' ecological habits. If ownership is transferred or a raccoon dies, the owners must notify the competent regional environment office within ten days. The Korean Association of Animal Industry will actively cooperate with the exotic animal cafe owners participating in the agreement to assist them in faithfully implementing the agreement. The Ministry of Environment will provide administrative and financial support for raccoon registration, conduct periodic inspections, and evaluate the outcomes of the pilot project to review the further expansion and systematization plans.

The ministry will build two sanctuaries⁴ to ensure the safety of abandoned exotic animals while maintaining the country's ecosystem. From January 2022, the ministry has been operating a temporary protection system for abandoned exotic wild animals together with local governments and wildlife rescue centers. In addition, the ministry will also start a public campaign to raise peoples' awareness that wildlife is not a property to be owned.

Kim Jong-ryul, Director-General of Nature Conservation Bureau, said, "The raccoon registration pilot program is designed to strengthen owners' responsibilities for wild animals and thus prevent abandonment and protect the country's ecosystem. We will keep working to enhance the system so that wildlife ownership and exhibitions would only take place in a safe environment."

³A rice grain-sized microchip (RFID) that does not harm the body and can be used semi-permanently. It is commonly used for pet registration, and it is possible to identify the animal information using a wireless reader when it is implanted in the animal's body.

⁴Two sanctuaries will be built around the National Institute of Ecology in Seochon-gun, Chungcheongnam-do, and within the premises of the old Janghang Refinery (National Institute of Ecology: to open at the end of 2023; Janghang Refinery site: to open in 2025)