

A freshwater lake which is important as a growth area for "Marimo", a beautiful green, ball-shaped algae

Akan-ko

Freshwater Lake

Geographical Coordinates: 43°27'N, 144°06'E / Altitude: 420m / Area: 1318ha / Major Type of Wetland: Freshwater lake (caldera lake) / Designation: Special Protection Zone and Special Zone of National Park / Municipalities Involved: Kushiro City, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: November 2005



Marimo



Akan-ko from the south



Akan-ko and Oakandake at sunrise

Principal Features:

Japan is known as the country with numerous volcanoes. As represented by Mt. Fuji, there are beautiful sceneries created by volcanoes. In fact, 2/3 of Japan's national parks have volcanoes. Akan National Park located in the eastern Hokkaido, north of Kushiro-shitsugen and south of Tofutsu-ko and Lake Abashiri, also embraces two volcanoes called Meakandake (1499m) and Oakandake (1370m). The Akan National Park is the second to be designated as a national park of Japan in 1934.

Akan-ko is a freshwater lake that lies between Meakandake and Oakandake at an altitude of 420m, occupying about 1300ha with its circumference of 25.9km. It is a caldera lake created by volcanic subsidence, with its average depth of 17m and the maximum of 42m.

Akan-ko is surrounded by mixed forests of conifers such as Ezo Spruce *Picea jezoensis* or Sachalin Fir *Abies sachalinensis*, and deciduous trees of Japanese Oak *Quercus crispula* and Japanese Linden *Tilia japonica*. Having adapted to severe environment in high mountains, Creeping Cedar *Pinus pumila* and Crowberry *Empetrum nigrum* can be also observed near the summit. In this manner, Akan-ko with its rich and diverse landscape creates the typical beautiful natural scenery of Japan.

The Protected Watershed:

The watershed of Akan-ko is a 3900ha forest in the periphery. The area had been under private ownerships, conducting forestry practices since the early 20th century. In 1983, a nature conservation foundation was established to protect and manage the entire water-

shed. The Akan-ko and the surrounding watershed has been a home to 24 mammal species and 65 bird species. Not only the large animals native to Hokkaido such as Eurasian Brown Bear *Ursus arctos* or Yezo Sika-deer *Cervus nippon yezoensis*, but also endangered birds such as Black Woodpecker *Dryocopes martius* and Blakiston's Fish Owl *Ketupa blakistoni* can be observed.

Rare Aquatic Species:

A number of rare freshwater algae species such as *Nitella flexilis*, *Chara globularis*, and the well-known Marimo *Cladophora aegagropila* are all observed in Akan-ko. This lake is also an important habitat for fish such as Kokanee *Oncorhynchus nerka* and Japanese Huchen *Hucho peryi*, the largest freshwater fish in Japan.

[Marimo *Cladophora aegagropila*]

Marimo *aegagropila* is a type of freshwater algae that grows into a soft, green, velvety ball exclusively in Akan-ko. As it grows larger, the inside becomes hollow crumbling into shreds when it exceeds 20cm in size, but eventually recovers the ball-shape after a long time.

Contact Information:

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