

Biwa-ko

Freshwater Lake

Geographical Coordinates: 35°15'N, 136°05'E / Altitude: 86m / Area: 65,984ha / Major Type of Wetland: Freshwater lake, low moors / Designation: Special Zone of Quasi-National Park / Municipalities Involved: 15 municipalities consisting of 10 Cities and 5 Towns, Shiga Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: June 1993



Harvesting reeds

Principal Features:

Biwa-ko is Japan's largest freshwater lake located almost at the center of the island of Honshu. The area is 67,033ha, the circumference 235km, and the average depth 41.2m. It is capable of storing 27.5 billion cubic meters of water, which sustain the livelihood of 14 million people. 460 rivers and streams of varying size flow into the lake. The Seta River is the lake's only natural outlet, which flows southwest to Osaka, the second largest city in Japan. There are small attached lakes called "Naiko" around Biwa-ko, connected by rivers or channels to the lake. Ramsar designation area of Biwa-ko was expanded in October 2008, and the Nishinoko, the biggest Naiko in existence, was included.

Endemic Species:

Biwa-ko is an old lake that is thought to have been formed approximately four million years ago. This diverse natural environment supports rich flora and fauna including 500 plant and 600 animal species. There are many endemic species such as 12 species of fish including the Willow minnow *Gnathopogon caerulescens*, the carp *Carassius carassius grandoculis* and the catfish *Silurus biwaensis*, as well as 20 species of freshwater shellfish.

The area is a part of the Waterbird Site Network based on the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

People's Involvement with the Lake:

Historically, Biwa-ko has played a major role in both the domestic and cultural life of the Japanese people. It is not

only important as a water source, but is vital for waterway transportation, fishing, tourism, and culture as well. The freshwater fishery industry is still active, including traditional fishing of *Carassius carassius grandoculis* and Ayu fish aquaculture. Large-scaled reed beds still exist around Nishinoko, and serve as habitats for many kinds of living creatures.

Ecological Movement for Water Resource Use:

Rapid economic growth in the Biwa-ko area resulted in serious issues such as water contamination, eutrophication, and the loss of reed communities. In order to improve and recover the ecosystem and water quality of Biwa-ko, Shiga Prefecture has taken several legislative measures including the enactment of the Biwa-ko Ordinance on Prevention of Eutrophication, Ordinance of Reed-Community Conservation and Natural Parks Law. The area also has a long history of community participation in conservation activities; for instance in the late 1970's, locals proposed a movement to use environmentally-friendly soap instead of neutral detergents, one of the causes of eutrophication. In 2001, Shiga Prefecture established the Mother Lake 21 Plan (Lake Biwa Comprehensive Environmental Conservation Plan) to further coordinate conservation efforts by the government and private sector.

[Reed *Phragmites australis*] Large perennial grass with heights ranging from 1-3m. Its leaves with widths of 2-4cm bend downwards. Reeds are seen in temperate and arctic zones, forming

View of Biwa-ko from the south



communities in marshlands, rivers, ponds and lakes. A typical component of Japanese waterside scenery as well as rice paddies. Reed communities contribute to water purification and the conservation of lakeshores. Its strong leaves and stems are traditionally used to make blinds and building materials.

Contact Information:

Shiga Pref. Govt. Office
<http://www.pref.shiga.jp/>

