

The lagoon with wetland forests and long sandbars in Japan's coldest climate. A stopover for migratory birds

Furen-ko and Shunkuni-tai

Brackish Lake, Seagrass/ Seaweed Bed, Sandbar

Geographical Coordinates: 43°17'N, 145°21'E / Altitude: 1m / Area: 6139ha / Major Type of Wetland: Brackish lakes, seagrass/seaweed beds, sandbars, low moors, tidal flats / Designation: Special Protection Zone of National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities Involved: Nemuro City and Betsukai Town, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: November 2005



Shunkuni-tai

Principal Features:

Furen-ko is a lagoon that used to be a part of the sea, developed on the base of Nemuro peninsula of Hokkaido, at the northeastern tip of Japan. The sandbars of Shunkuni-tai extends from the south, and Hashirikotan stretches from the north respectively between Okhotsk Sea and Furen-ko, allowing seawater to flow through two waterways. Furen-ko extends 20km from east to west with its circumference of 65km covering the area of 5600ha. Its depth remains to be relatively shallow at 11m forming a large tidal flat on its shore. Among the 13 rivers flowing into Furen-ko, the estuary of Furen River in particular has developed into a salt marsh forming a vast unique landscape.

Shunkuni-tai resembles a lid on Furen-ko lagoon. It consists of three rows of sand dunes created by sands carried from sea currents in different eras between 3000 years ago and 1500 years ago. A wide variety of wildlife inhabits this area of 600ha, extending 8km to embrace sand dunes, grasslands, forests, salt marshes, and tidal flats. In particular, Sakhalin Spruce *Picea glehnii* forest growing on the sand dunes has attracted international attention for its uniqueness.

Furen-ko's amazing diversity of ecosystem includes approximately 280 species of birds including shorebirds, swans and geese. The lagoon is their resting spot during the long migration. It is also one of the most popular places for birdwatch-

ers to observe rare species such as White-tailed Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*, Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*, and Blakiston's Fish Owl *Ketupa blakistoni*, attracting both domestic and international visitors all the year round. In addition to the Shunkuni-tai Nature Center, tourists can enjoy the nature observation trails as well as panoramic lookout points.

Warmth Index:

The Nemuro Peninsula has the lowest warmth index in Japan. A warmth index can be calculated by subtracting 5°C from the average temperature each month, then aggregate the total. The index shows a correlation between vegetation distribution and temperature fluctuation of an area. The Nemuro Peninsula stays cold throughout the year exposed to fogs produced by sea currents in summer and drift ice in winter. Such environmental conditions create a unique and diverse landscape of Furen-ko.

[White-tailed Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*] A large, brown body and yellowish-brown head with yellow bill and legs. The body length reaches 80cm, and the wingspan reaches 2m. Widely found in the Eurasian continent, wintering in Japan. Commonly seen perching on drift ice in the eastern Hokkaido.

Contact Information:

Nemuro City Office
<http://www.city.nemuro.hokkaido.jp/dcindynd.nsf/>
Betsukai Town Office
<http://betsukai.jp/>



White-tailed Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*



Sakhalin Spruce Forest (Photo by M. Okada)

