

Kutcharo-ko

Brackish Lake, Low Moor

Geographical Coordinates: 45°09'N, 142°20'E / Altitude: 1-2m / Area: 1607ha / Major Type of Wetland: Freshwater lake, low moors / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities Involved: Hamatonbetsu Town, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: July 1989



Feeding the Tundra Swan



Kutcharo-ko (Photo by M. Okada)



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Principal Features:

Close to the Sea of Okhotsk, Kutcharo-ko is one of the northernmost lakes in Japan. Two interconnected lakes called Onuma and Konuma form the coastal freshwater lake basin. The site is bordered by hills (elevation 10-40m) to the north and west, a major sand dune system to the east, and peatlands to the south.

Six rivers provide inflow to Konuma, and two rivers to Onuma. The only outflow is Kutcharo River on the east end of Onuma, leading to the ocean. Onuma is subject to seawater inflow at high tide.

The area is an important staging ground for migratory waterfowl, where 290 species of mainly ducks and geese have been recorded. This area is a part of the Waterbird Site Network based on the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, well-known as Japan's northernmost grounds for wintering Tundra Swans *Cygnus columbianus*. Approximately 20,000 swans visit the area for every spring and autumn.

In 1995, the "Hamatonbetsu Kutcharo-ko Waterfowl Observation Center" was established by the Ministry of the Environment for the purposes of raising public awareness. The center is managed and operated by staff of Hamatonbetsu Town and provides environmental education programs for visitors and local students.

Protection of Swans:

Despite its location on the northern end of Hokkaido, Kutcharo-ko enjoys relatively warm climate due to warm ocean currents. However, it still freezes over between late December and early March; in some years drift ice accumulates on the adjacent coast from mid January to late March. Upon the freezing of the lake, local volunteers started to feed the swans in 1960s. Today, staff and volunteers at the center carry out the feeding.

[Tundra Swan Migration] Between the months of June through September, the Tundra Swan inhabits and breeds in the Siberian tundra. From about October, swans and their offspring arrive in

Kutcharo-ko, the gateway to the Japanese Archipelago. Following a brief sojourn, they continue to migrate south to winter mostly in lakes and rivers facing the Sea of Japan. Some even reach as far south as Nakaumi and Shinji-ko. From April to May, they once again return to Kutcharo-ko before flying onto Siberia.

Contact Information:

Hamatonbetsu Town Office
<http://www.town.hamatonbetsu.hokkaido.jp/toppage.php>

