

and other factors caused by degradation of surrounding environment. As these trends are still continuing today, their conservation is a pressing issue. In addition, there are many reports of damages on the Eelgrass bed growing at the important part of several bays by the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011.

Particularly large Eelgrass beds remain in Notsuke-wan, a Ramsar site in Hokkaido.



Tidal flats:

In the Seashore Survey of 1998, 49,380ha of tidal flats (exceeding 100m in width and 1ha in area) were identified. When tidal flats are exposed and submerged repeatedly, rich nutritious sediments from the river and sea are deposited there to build up a rich community of microorganisms and benthos. The water purification function of these organisms attracts people's attention these days. Tidal flats are indispensable habitat for shorebirds for feeding and resting as well.

Due to scarcities in flatlands, tidal flats tend to become the targets in various development projects in Japan, and consequently 6000ha of tidal flats disappeared in the twenty years following 1978. Some of the existing tidal flats are under the threat of development even now. The Ramsar sites of Yatsu-higata, Fujimae-higata, three sites in the Ariake Sea namely Higashiyoka-higata, Hizen Kashima-higata and Arao-higata, Manko and Yonaha-wan are valuable examples of tidal flats that have been barely preserved.

Mangrove Forests:

According to the Seashore Survey (1998), out of 2670ha of mangrove forests in Japan, over 95% are found in Okinawa Prefecture. Although most are small in scale, there are a few which exceed 100ha in area. Out of over 100 species of mangrove plant in the world, 7 species belonging to 4 families have been identified in Japan. The

mangrove forests are found in Manko, and Nagura Amparu, Ramsar sites in Okinawa.

Coral Reefs:

The total area of reef-building corals in Japan is approximately 35,350ha, most of which are located south of the Tokara Archipelago in the Nansei Islands, Kagoshima Prefecture. The species diversity of reef-building corals found there is among the most outstanding in the world. Kushimoto Coral Communities with a unique high latitude coral community, and Keramashoto Coral Reef with a magnificent coral community are the Ramsar sites with coral reefs in Japan.

Ramsar Sites in Japan

When Japan became a contracting party to the Ramsar Convention in 1980, Kushiro-shitsugen became Japan's first Ramsar site. In 1993, Kushiro City hosted the Fifth Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties (COP5) to the Ramsar Convention, greatly raising awareness of the objectives of the Ramsar Convention in Japan and the rest of Asia.

Japan has promoted additional designation of wetlands on the occasion of each COP.

Hinuma, Yoshigadaira Wetlands, Higashiyoka-higata and Hizen Kashima-higata were newly designated as Ramsar sites on the occasion of COP 12 held in Uruguay in June 2015, for a count of 50 sites in Japan in total. Wetlands are classified into 42 types by the Annex I to the Resolution VIII.13 of the Ramsar Convention (See Appendix 3). Ramsar sites in Japan include various types of wetlands such as marshlands, lakes, rice paddies, seagrass/sea-weed beds, tidal flats, mangrove forests, coral reefs and groundwater systems, reflecting the diversity of Japan's wetland ecosystem. Most Ramsar sites function as important habitats for waterbirds.

The Ramsar Convention identifies the criteria for wetlands of international importance by the Annex II to the Resolution VIII.13 and so forth (See Appendix 4). When selecting candidate wetlands for Ramsar sites, Japan sees the following as prerequisites.

1. Meet the international criteria set by the Ramsar Convention;
2. Ensure long term conservation of the site through national legislation of laws such as the Natural Parks Law and Wildlife Protection and Hunting Law;
3. Gain consent and support of the local communities.

The Conservation and Wise Use of Wetlands

Defining wetlands in the broadest of terms, the Ramsar Convention aims to promote their conservation and wise use. The 'wise use' of wetlands is defined as "sustainable utilization for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem." In Japan where people have been fostering a culture to coexist with nature instead of controlling it, there are a number of examples of wise use practiced by people for a long period of time. Rice cultivation in paddies is a form of wetland management. Domestic use of reed and lotus plants that have a function to prevent eutrophication in lakes and marshes, and local rules for hunting and fishing are other examples of wise use. It often is important for the promotion of wise use in each region to review these regional cultures and traditions.

Policy for Wetland Conservation:

Japan's national policy on wetlands is described in National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2012–2020 (established in 2012). In order to conserve the unique ecological character of wetlands while achieving consensus of the society, it directs us to promote conservation in a big picture encompassing the river basin and coastal areas, using various measures such as grasping the ecological changes and conservation status through monitoring, expanding protected areas, implementing nature restoration projects and networking the wetlands.

Laws for the Conservation of the Natural Environment:

Legislation for nature conservation and the protection of wildlife in Japan include the Basic Environmental Law, Basic Act on Biodiversity, Nature Conservation Law, Natural Parks Law, Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, Protection and