

The first bird sanctuary in Japan and an important stopover site for migratory birds, where over 260 bird species recorded.

## Utonai-ko

## Freshwater Lake, Low Moor

Geographical Coordinates: 42°42'N, 141°43'E / Altitude: 1-5m / Area: 510ha / Major Type of Wetland: Freshwater lake, low moor / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities Involved: Tomakomai City, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: December 1991 / Ramsar Criteria: 2, 5 / EAAFP Flyway Network Site



Full view of Utonai-ko



Nature center



Medical treatment of a bird

Staging and wintering ground for waterbirds



### General Overview:

Utonai-ko is a freshwater lake with an area of 243ha, situated in the floodplain of the Bibi River in the eastern suburb of Tomakomai City in southwestern Hokkaido. It used to be a coastal inlet before it was isolated from the sea by a sand bar and a sand hill about 3000 years ago. The area around this lake was a vast wetland called Yufutsu plain but most of it has disappeared due to land reclamation. Utonai-ko is one of a few places where the original natural environment still remains. The shoreline of the lake is a swamp of reed and sedge, which is surrounded by a deciduous alder tree forest.

### Stopover Site for Waterfowl:

The area is one of the most important stopover sites and wintering grounds in Japan for migratory birds. Tens of thousands of birds including the White-fronted Goose, Bean Goose, Whooper Swan, and Tundra

Swan visit the area every year. The marshland around the lake serves as an important breeding ground for Siberian Rubythroat, and Yellow-breasted Bunting, and the forest is a winter habitat for White-tailed Sea Eagle and Steller's Sea Eagle. More than 260 bird species are recorded in and around the lake.

### The First Bird Sanctuary in Japan:

In 1981, Tomakomai City and the Wild Bird Society of Japan (WBSJ) designated the area as the first bird sanctuary in Japan. With collaboration with a local NGO, WBSJ signed an agreement with Tomakomai City to rent the land and designated an area of 510ha including the lake and surrounding marshland and forest as the Utonai-ko Sanctuary.

A lakeshore area of about 50ha is open to visitors, as well as a nature center, seven nature observation trails and some observation hides. For reasons of protection, entry

into other areas is restricted.

In 2002, the Ministry of the Environment established the Utonai-ko Wildlife Center on the site. This is the first facility in Japan built for the purposes of conducting appropriate management of National Wildlife Protection Area along with environmental education. Operated with the cooperation of the ministry and Tomakomai City, the center organizes activities in environmental education and public awareness, as well as offering medical treatment to wildlife.

**[Sanctuary]** WBSJ Established Japan's first sanctuary in Utonai-ko in 1981 for the purpose of conserving the habitats of wildlife. A nature center was built as a base for regular activities such as research, ecosystem management, information services, and environmental education supported by a stationed ranger. The nature center contributed significantly to raising public awareness for wetland conservation and wild bird protection.

### Contact Information:

Tomakomai City Office  
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