

Biwa-ko

Freshwater Lake

Geographical Coordinates: 35°15'N, 136°05'E / Altitude: 85.6m / Area: 65,984ha / Major Type of Wetland: Freshwater lake, low moor / Designation: Special Zone of Quasi-National Park / Municipalities Involved: 10 Cities, Shiga Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: June 1993 / Ramsar Criteria: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7



Harvesting reeds

General Overview:

Biwa-ko is Japan's largest freshwater lake and is located almost at the center of Honshu, the main island of Japan. It has an area of 67,033ha, a circumference of 235km, and an average depth of 41.2m. With a capacity to store 27.5 billion cubic meters of water, the lake is sustaining the livelihood of 14 million people. 460 rivers varying in size flow into the lake. The lake's only natural outlet is the Seta River which flows southwest to Osaka, the second largest city in Japan. There are some small lakes around Biwa-ko. They are connected by rivers or channels to Biwa-ko and collectively referred to as "naiko". The Ramsar designation area of Biwa-ko was expanded in October 2008 to include Nishinoko, the biggest naiko in existence.

Endemic Species:

Biwa-ko is an old lake that is thought to be formed approximately 4 million years ago. The diverse natural environment of Biwa-ko supports rich flora and fauna including 500 plant species and 600 animal species. There are many endemic species including 15 species of fish such as the Willow Minnow, the carp species called "Nigorobuna" *Carassius carassius grandoculis* and the Lake Biwa Catfish as well as 30 species of freshwater shellfish. This area is included in the Flyway Site Network under the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

The Lake, People and Culture:

Biwa-ko has played a major role in the life and culture of the people for a long period of time not only as an abundant water

source but also as a base for water transportation, fishing and tourism. Freshwater fishery is thriving, including the traditional fishing of Nigorobuna Carp and aquaculture of Ayu fish and fresh water pearls. The Nishinoko and the surrounding area have diverse plant communities including one of the largest reed beds in Japan.

People's Movement for Water Use:

Rapid economic growth in the Biwa-ko area resulted in a series of serious problems 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 enforcement of the Biwa-ko Ordinance on Prevention of Eutrophication, the Ordinance of Reed-Community Conservation and the Natural Parks Law. The area also has a long history of community participation in conservation activities. For instance, in the late 1970's, locals took an action to use environmentally-friendly soap instead of neutral detergents that cause eutrophication. Shiga Prefectural Government established the "Mother Lake 21 Plan" (Lake Biwa Comprehensive Environmental Conservation Plan) in 2001, and is promoting collaborative conservation efforts with private sectors.

[Reed *Phragmites australis*] A large perennial grass with heights ranging from 1-3m with leaves that bend downward and have a width of 2-4cm. Reeds are seen in temperate and arctic zones, forming communities in marshlands, rivers, ponds and



View of Biwa-ko from the south

lakes. It is a typical component of the waterside landscape in Japan along with rice paddies. Reed communities contribute to water purification and lake shore protection. The sturdy leaves and stems are traditionally used as a material for blinds and thatched roofs.

Contact Information:

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