

## Oyama Kami-ike and Shimo-ike

Geographical Coordinates: 38°44'N, 139°45'E / Altitude: 12m / Area: 39ha / Major type of wetland: freshwater lake, water storage area / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities involved: Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture / Ramsar designation: October 2008 / Ramsar Criteria: 2, 5, 6

## Freshwater Lake, Water Storage Area

Shimo-ike in winter



View of Shimo-ike from the west



Shimo-ike and the bird watching hide in the back



Kami-ike covered with lotus flowers in summer



### General Overview:

The Shonai Plain stretches in the lower reaches of the Mogami River and the Aka River in northwestern Yamagata Prefecture on the northern coast of the Japan Sea. Tsuruoka City is situated in the south-east of the plain, in the middle reaches of the Aka River. The city was a castle town of the Shonai-clan in the Edo-period from 1603 to 1868. This is the second largest city in Yamagata Prefecture and has a population of 140,000. The city is a base of mountain worship for the famous Three Mountains of Dewa (Mt. Hagurosan, Mt. Gassan and Mt. Yudonosan).

Oyama Kami-ike and Shimo-ike are two small ponds (15ha and 24ha) that are located approximately 9 km west from Tsuruoka City. They were dug out approximately 400 years ago as irrigation reservoirs. The Shonai Plains stretches to the east of the ponds as a leading rice production area in the northeast region of Japan. Oyama is an old town famous for brewing industry. The name appears in an old diary kept by an attendant for the famous poet Basho in the Edo-period.

A series of low hills run along the coast from north to south in the west of Kami-ike and Shimo-ike. In winter, it serves as a windshield that blocks cold northwestern wind from the Sea of Japan.

In the Edo-period, this area was owned by the Government and logging was prohibited. Because of this, a broad-leaved tree forest with beech trees survived in this area ensuring a stable water supply from the catchment area to the two ponds. Thus, the area has preserved its scenic beauty as well as the diverse ecosystem that embraces rare species of plants, fishes, dragonflies, butterflies and birds.

### Wintering site for 60,000 Mallards:

Blessed with the good natural conditions, Kami-ike and Shimo-ike welcome more than 20,000 water birds every year such as swans and ducks as their wintering or stopover site. Once, the population of Mallards exceeded 60,000 in a year. Many birdwatchers visit the observation hide named "Oura Aicho-kan" at Shimoike during the peak season. The walking trail around Shimo-ike is a popular place for recreation for the local people.

Kami-ike is covered with lotus flowers in summer because a local cooperative cultivates lotuses to sell as the offering for the Bon festival. Many people visit the pond throughout the year to appreciate the beauty of the pond vegetation such as the White Skunk Cabbage and *Erythronium japonicum* in spring and colored leaves in autumn.



**[Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*]** The mallard is a duck species with a body length of 59cm. The male bird is called "Ao-kubi" which means green head in Japanese. It has a brilliant green head, a white collar, dark brown breast, and a greenish yellow bill. It is one of the most common duck species that fly to Japan and it winters in flocks in ponds, marshes and rivers. They often feed in rice paddies or other area at night.

### Contact Information:

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