

Tofutsu-ko

Brackish Lake

Geographical Coordinates: 43°56'N, 144°24'E / Altitude: 1m / Area: 900ha / Major Type of Wetland: Brackish lake / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area, Special Area of Quasi National Park / Municipalities Involved: Abashiri City and Koshimizu Town, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: November 2005 / Ramsar Criteria: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6



The shore covered with Common Glassworts

General Overview:

Along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk, from Cape Soya, the northernmost cape in Japan, to Shiretoko Peninsula, a world heritage site, there are a number of lakes, marshes and lagoons of various sizes such as Kutcharo-ko, Komuke-ko, Saroma-ko, Notoro-ko, Abashiri-ko, and Tofutsu-ko. Tofutsu-ko lies in the southernmost part of this area. The name of this lagoon comes from indigenous Ainu word "Toput" which means "the mouth of lake". This lagoon was isolated from the sea by a sand hill that developed from sandbanks, and has a small outlet to the sea at the north-west end of it. The lagoon has an area of approximately 900ha, and the perimeter of 27km. It is a shallow lake with an average depth of 1.1m, and a maximum depth of 2.5m. This lagoon has an excellent environment for migratory birds and many birds visit here to stopover or to winter.

Tofutsu-ko is an important habitat for more than 60,000 ducks and geese, supporting more than 1% of East Asian regional population of Bean Goose, Whooper Swan, Wigeon, Smew and Red-breasted Merganser. White-tailed Sea Eagle and Steller's Sea Eagle also spend their winter here, and breeding Yellow-breasted Buntings, a rare bird species in Japan, were observed here.

A salt marsh has developed in the low area along the shore with aquatic communities such as Seaside Arrowgrass and Marsh Arrowgrass. In Particular, the communities of Common Glasswort in beauti-

ful red autumn color attracts many tourists to the lakes along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk. The freshwater marsh is covered with wetland plant communities such as reed, sedge and alder. The lake has been a good fishing ground of shrimps, clams and oysters for a long period of time because the dense water plant communities of *Zostera nana* in the lake support a good habitat for fish. The fishermen practice fishery resource management including fish fry releasing and self-imposed control.

Koshimizu Wild Flower Garden:

The wetland plant community that stretches 8km long and has an area of 275ha on the sand hill between Tofutsu-ko and the Sea of Okhotsk is called "Koshimizu Wild Flower Garden". Approximately 40 species of wild flowers including Japanese Rose bloom from spring to autumn and many tourists visit this natural garden along with enjoying the beautiful landscape of the lagoon. In order to sustain its sound ecological condition, controlled burning of dead grasses is carried out every spring before the flowers bloom.

[Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea*] It has a height of 10-35cm and is an annual plant that belongs to family *Chenopodiaceae*. This plant is the most salt tolerant among those found along the coast. Although distributed from Hokkaido to Honshu, the Japanese name comes from the name of Lake Akkeshi-ko where it was found for the first time. It turns vivid red in autumn.

Tofutsu-ko and Mt. Shari



View of Tofutsu-ko from the east



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