

A lake traditionally managed by locals for the irrigation of rice paddies. Notable wintering site for swans

Sakata

Freshwater Lake

Geographical Coordinates: 37°49'N, 138°53'E / Altitude: 5m / Area: 76ha / Major Type of Wetland: Freshwater lake / Designation: Special Protection Zone of Quasi-National Park, National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities Involved: Niigata City, Niigata Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: March 1996



A view of Sakata from the east

Lotus blossoms at Sakata

Principal Features:

Sakata is a 43.6ha freshwater lake with marshland on its shores. Several thousand years ago, it was a lagoon connected to the Sea of Japan. Now it is separated from the ocean and located amidst sand dunes and pine forests.

The lake has no inflowing river, but is fed from groundwater running under the dune. Functioning as an agricultural reservoir, it irrigates downstream rice paddies through a gate on the east end.

Because it does not freeze over in winter, Sakata is a wintering site for waterfowl such as swans, geese and ducks. The area is a part of the Waterbird Site Network based on the Partnership for the East Asian-Australasian Flyway.

Traditional Use of the Lake:

Historically, local farmers claimed water rights for Sakata as an irrigation lake for downstream rice paddies, and managed the lake according to traditional management schemes. Today, the local community still takes charge of controlling water levels, and fishing rights are claimed by local fishermen. In the past when Sakata was more heavily depended upon for irrigation, the whole community was rounded up for its extensive cleanup and repair, an event known as the "Katabushin" that included activities such as channel repair,

waterweed removal, dredging of soil and sand sediments, among others.

However, since the 1970s when rice paddies were either abandoned by government policy or converted into residential sites due to urbanization, Sakata ceased to function as an upstream irrigation system as before. As a result, the local community's close ties to Sakata were altered, and the "Katabushin" tradition was stopped.

Rebuilding Ties Between Sakata and the Community:

The Ramsar designation of Sakata in 1996 presented the local community an opportunity to rebuild ties to the lake. With a focus on community participation, Niigata City established the Sakata Natural Environment Conservation Plan for conserving biodiversity and natural resource productivity. Using the Waterfowl and Wetland Center in Sakata established by the Ministry of the Environment as a base, the local community, NGOs, and the government are collaborating to consider ways to build a modern relationship with Sakata. For example, starting in 2003, the "Sakata Cleanup Activity" was introduced as a revival of the "Katabushin" where cleanups, dredging, and waterweed control are conducted by the local community, volunteers, and NGOs.



[Prickly water lily *Euryale ferox*]

With a lily pad exceeding 1m in diameter, it is the largest annual in Japan. Its lily pad is covered with thorns, and its blossoms, which appear to break through the lily pad, are red-purple.

Contact Information:

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