

Tofutsu-ko

Brackish Lake

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



The shore filled with Common Glassworts

About the Wetland:

Along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk, a number of lakes and marshes such as Kucharo-ko, Komuke-ko, Saroma-ko, Notoro-ko, Abashiri-ko, and Tofutsu-ko range from the northernmost Soya Cape to Shiretoko Peninsula, known as the world natural heritage. Tofutsu-ko lies in the southernmost part of this area, and it has an Ainu name of "Toputsu (the mouth of lake)." Sand dunes developed on a sandbank have created Tofutsu-ko by dividing it from the sea, forming a saline lagoon with a small waterway that connects the lake and the sea. The lagoon occupies approximately 900ha, and its perimeter reaches 27km. Its average depth remains shallow with only 0.7m with 2.5m at the deepest, which creates an excellent environment for numerous migratory birds to stop over and spend their 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 *Anser fabalis middendorffii*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Smew *Mergellus albellus*, and Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*. White-tailed Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* and Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus* also spend their winter, and it is also a breeding spot for the rare Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola*.

Salt marshland is developed in the lowlands along the shore, where rare aquatic plant communities adapted to

saline environment such as Seaside Arrowgrass *Triglochin maritimum* and Marsh Arrowgrass *Triglochin palustre* reside. In particular, Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea* that fills the shore with beautiful red color in autumn has now made this lagoon a popular sight-seeing spot for many tourists.

Koshimizu Natural Flower Garden:

The wetland plant community that extends 8km in length and occupies an area of 275ha on the sand dune between Tofutsu-ko and the Sea of Okhotsk is called the Koshimizu Natural Flower Garden. From spring to autumn, approximately 40 species of wild flowers including Japanese Rose *Rosa rugosa*, *Lilium maculatum*, and *Hemerocallis lilioasphodelus* var. *yezoensis* bloom, and many tourists visit the garden together with Tofutsu-ko. In order to sustain a sound ecological condition, dead grasses in the area are burned off each year before spring. Similarly, browsing by horses is allowed for maintaining the plant communities on the lake shore.

[Common Glasswort *Salicornia europaea*] Height: 10-35cm. A yearly plant that belongs to family *Chenopodiaceae*. It is the most tolerant plant in saline environment among all the brackish-adapted plants observed nearby the sea. Although distributed from Hokkaido to Honshu, its Japanese name was named after Akkeshi Lake since it was first found in this place. It turns into vivid red color in autumn.

Tofutsu-ko



View of Tofutsu-ko from the east



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