

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



Migratory birds beginning to arrive in autumn



Shimo-ike and the bird watching hide in the back



Kami-ike covered with lotus flowers in summer

General Overview:

The Shonai Plain stretches along the lower reaches of the Mogami River and the Aka River in the northwestern part of the Yamagata Prefecture on the northern coast of the Japan Sea. Tsuruoka City is situated in the southeast of the plain, in the middle reaches of the Aka River. The city used to be a castle town of the former Shonai-clan in the Edo-period from 1603 to 1868. It is a base of mountain worship for the famous Three Mountains of Dewa (Mt. Haguro, Mt. Gassan and Mt. Yudono).

Oyama Kami-ike and Shimo-ike are two small ponds (15ha and 24ha) located approximately 9 km to the west of Tsuruoka City. They were dug out approximately 400 years ago as irrigation reservoirs. The Shonai Plain stretches to the east of the ponds and is known as one of the leading rice production areas in the northeast region of Japan. Oyama is an old town famous for its brewing industry. The name appears in an old diary written by the famous poet Basho's travelling companion 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, these hills serve as a windshield that blocks cold

northwestern wind from the Sea of Japan. During the Edo-period, this area was owned by the Government and logging was prohibited. Consequently, 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 of rare plants, fish, dragonflies, butterflies and birds.

Wintering Site for 60,000 Mallard:

Blessed with good natural conditions, Kami-ike and Shimo-ike welcome more than 20,000 waterbirds every year such as swans and ducks as their wintering or stopover site. There is a record of more than 60,000 of Mallard flying in one year. Many birdwatchers visit the observation hide named "Oura Aicho-kan" at Shimo-ike during the peak season. Furthermore, the walking trail around Shimo-ike is a popular recreational site for local residents.

The lotus and other floating plants growing in both ponds are managed by a local cooperative. The water surface is covered with lotus flowers, and the scene is a local summer tradition. The lotus flowers and leaves are harvested and sold as flowers for the Bon Festival. Many people visit the

pond throughout the year to appreciate the beauty of the pond vegetation such as White Skunk Cabbage and *Erythronium japonicum* in spring and colored leaves in autumn.

[Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)] Mallard is a duck species with a body length of 60cm. The male bird is called "Ao-kubi" which means green head in Japanese. It has a brilliant green head, a white collar, a 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 areas at night.

Contact Information:

Tsuruoka City Office
<http://www.city.tsuruoka.lg.jp/>

