

Hyo-ko

Water Storage Area, Pond

Geographical coordinates: 37°50'N, 139°14'E / Altitude: 8.6m / Area: 24ha / Major type of wetland: Water storage area, pond / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities involved: Agano City, Niigata Prefecture / Ramsar designation: October 2008 / Ramsar Criteria: 2,3,6 / EAAFP Flyway Network Site



Hyo-ko filled with blooming lotuses in summer



Hyo-ko and cherry blossoms



Hyo-ko viewed from the west in winter

General Overview

With Agano River from Fukushima Prefecture meandering through, the north-east inland of the Niigata Plain is a flat and wet lowland that stretches out into a vast field of rice paddies. Hyo-ko is a small pond in Agano City located in the center of the rice production area in this plain.

Initially two reservoirs were connected and shaped like a gourd, but they were partially filled in and the gourd image is no longer present. With the addition of three more ponds - Higashi-shin-ike developed in 1991 and Sakura-ike and Ayame-ike were developed in 2000. Today, the four ponds are open to the public as the Hyo-ko Waterbird Park.

Hyo-ko is only 0.7m deep on average, and 1.2m deep at its deepest point. It has very small inflows from nearby streams, and is practically a static pond. Plant species such as "Onibishi" *Trapa natans* var. *japonica*, Lotus, and Prickly Water Lily flourish in the pond, and Reed and Manchurian Wild Rice are found on the shore.

Cherry trees have been planted on the pond's bank; however, the pond can be observed from all directions because the bank is low and flat.

Swan Lake, Hyo-ko:

In the Edo-period, hunting was prohibited in Hyo-ko, and this ban continued even after the Meiji period, allowing Hyo-ko to become a paradise for waterbirds. To this day, Hyo-ko remains a feeding and resting place for migratory birds and welcomes approximately 6,000 swans, including Tundra Swan, and more than 30,000 ducks, including Northern Pintail, Mallard, Common Teal, and Pochard every year.

In particular, Hyo-ko is the first place in Japan where people succeeded in feeding swans in 1954. Hence, Hyo-ko came to be known nationwide as "Swan Lake", and it greatly influenced the movement for wild bird protection. Even today, community-based conservation activities are widely undertaken by individuals from elementary school children to the elderly. Because of the locality's historic background and local people's efforts for conservation, people can watch swans and other waterbirds in Hyo-ko.

Wetlands Scattered on Niigata Plain:

In addition to Hyo-ko, the Niigata Plain, a major rice production area, has many safe and rich resting sites for waterbirds, including Sakata (a Ramsar site), Toyonogata, and Fukushima-gata.

[Tundra Swan (*Cygnus columbianus*)] In Hyo-ko, 90% of the swan is Tundra Swan. They stay from mid-October to mid-March to feed and rest in Hyo-ko and its neighboring rice paddies. Every morning, they fly from their resting area around 6:30 to 9:00 a.m., feed on leftover crops such as rice grains in harvested rice paddies, and return to their resting area around 3 p.m. They move around in family flocks with their juveniles. Only a limited number of birds, such as those that are ill or injured, depend on artificial feeding. In contrast, nocturnal ducks spend the daytime in Hyo-ko.

Contact Information:

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