

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 / Ramsar Criteria: 3, 5, 6 / EAAFP Flyway Network Site



Sakata on a winter morning (Photo by Y. Sato)

General Overview:

Sakata is located in the Akatsuka district of Niigata City's Nishi Ward and comprises two lagoons (43.6ha), Uwakata and Shitaka, and the surrounding low marshland. Thousands of years ago, it was a brackish lagoon formed on the coastline and was connected to the Sea of Japan. However, it has now been cut off from the sea and is currently a freshwater lake surrounded by pine forests and farmland.

Sakata has no river inflow and is supplied by spring water from surrounding dunes and rainwater. With only one outlet, the water flowing out of Sakata's east gate is used to irrigate paddy fields in the downstream area, as well as for agricultural use in times of emergency. The surface of the lake has water chestnut and other plants.

The Echigo Plain at the mouth of the Shinano River and Agano River is scattered with many lakes and marshes. As Sakata does not freeze in winter, it is a wintering site for waterfowls such as swans, geese, and ducks. More than 3,000 Tundra Swan winters here annually. They leave the lake early in the morning to feed in the surrounding rice paddies and return in the evening to spend the night in the lake.

Traditional Use of the Lake:

Historically, local farmers claimed water rights to Sakata as an irrigation lake for the rice paddies in the lower reaches, and managed the lake according to traditional management schemes. Even today, the local community takes charge of controlling water levels. In the past, when people more heavily depended upon irrigation,



Waterfowls taking off (Photo by Y. Sato)



Katafushin at Sakata (Photo by Y. Ozawa)

the entire community worked together for its maintenance. A cleanup work called "Katafushin", such as repairing of waterways, removing waterweeds, and dredging accumulated sediments was once conducted by all local residents.

However, since the 1970s, when rice paddies were either abandoned following government policy or converted into residential sites due to urbanization, Sakata ceased to function as an upstream irrigation system. Consequently, the local community lost its close ties with Sakata, and the "Katafushin" tradition was discontinued.

Rebuilding Ties Between Sakata and the Community:

The Ramsar designation of Sakata in 1996 presented the local community with an opportunity to restore their ties with the lake. With a focus on community participation, Niigata City established the Sakata Natural Environment Conservation Plan for conserving biodiversity and natural resource productivity in the lake. 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 have been collaborating to build a modern relationship with Sakata. For example, starting in 2003, the "Sakata Cleanup" event was introduced as a revival of "Katafushin", where cleanups, dredging, and waterweed control are conducted by the local community, volunteers, and NGOs. A lot of lakes and marshes are scattered at the mouth of the Agano River and the Shinano River in the Echigo Plain, where a variety of waterfowls, including Tundra Swan, Greater White-fronted Goose and Bean Goose, fly in to and winter.

Contact Information:

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