Biwa-ko

Freshwater Lake, Low Moor

Geographical Coordinates: 35°15′N, 136°05′E / Altitude: 85.6m / Area: 65,984ha / MajorType of Wetland: Freshwater lake, low moor / Designation: Special Zone of Quasi-National Park / Municipalities Involved: 10 Cities, Shiga Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: June 1993 / Ramsar Criteria: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7 / EAAFP Flyway Network Site



Harvesting reeds

General Overview:

Biwa-ko is the largest freshwater lake in Japan and is located almost at the center of Honshu, the main island of Japan. It has an area of 66,926ha, a circumference of 235km, and an average depth of 41.2m. With the capacity to store 27.5 billion tons of water, the lake sustains the livelihood of 14.5 million people. A total of 460 rivers of varying sizes flow into the lake. Its only natural outlet is the Seta River, which flows southwest to Osaka, Japan's second populated city. There are some small lakes around Biwa-ko. They are connected to Biwa-ko by rivers or channels and are collectively known as "naiko". The Ramsar designation area of Biwa-ko was expanded in October 2008 to include Nishinoko (382ha), the biggest naiko in existence. **Endemic Species:**

Biwa-ko is an ancient lake that is thought to be formed approximately 4 million years ago. Biwa-ko's diverse natural environment is home to over 1,700 aquatic animal and plant species. There are many endemic species including 17 species of fish such as *Gnathopogon caerulescens*, Biwa Trout and *Silurus biwaensis* as well as 30 species of freshwater shellfish. This area is an important wintering site for waterfowl such as ducks, geese, and swans. **The Lake, People and Culture:**

Biwa-ko has played a significant role in the life and culture of the people for a long time not only as an abundant water source but also as a base for water transportation, fishing, and tourism. Freshwater fishery is thriving, including the traditional fishing of Nigoro-buna Carp and aquaculture of Ayu fish and freshwater pearls. Moreover, Nishinoko and its surrounding areas have diverse plant communities including one of the largest reed beds in Japan.

Importance of Biwa-ko as Natural Resources:

Rapid economic growth in the Biwa-ko area resulted in a series of serious problems such as water contamination, eutrophication, and the loss of reed communities. In order to improve and recover the ecosystem and water quality of Biwa-ko, Shiga Prefecture has taken several legislative measures including the enforcement of the Biwa-ko Ordinance on Prevention of Eutrophication, the Ordinance of Reed Community Conservation and the Natural Parks Law. The area also has a long history of community participation in conservation efforts. For instance, in the late 1970s, locals began using environmentally-friendly soap instead of neutral detergents that cause eutrophication. As of 2021, the Mother Lake Goals (MLGs) Agenda, the Biwa-ko version of the SDGs, is being developed for 2030.

[Common Reed (Phragmites australis)]

Large perennial grass with heights ranging from 1-3m with leaves that bend downward and have a width of 2-4cm. Reeds are seen in temperate and arctic zones, forming communities in marshlands, rivers, ponds and lakes. It is a typical component



View of Biwa-ko from the southwest

of the waterside landscape in Japan along with rice paddies. Reed communities contribute to water purification and protection of lake shores. The sturdy leaves and stems are traditionally used as a material for reed screens and reed roofs. **Contact Information:**

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