

## 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



A view of Sakata from the east

Lotus flowers in Sakata

### General Overview:

Sakata is a 43.6ha freshwater lake with marshes along its shores. Several thousand years ago, it was a lagoon connected to the Sea of Japan. Now it is separated from the ocean and located in a basin among sand dunes surrounded by farmland and pine forests.

The lake has no river inflow, but is fed by groundwater running under the dunes. It has only one outlet and the water drains into a river from a gate on the east end of the lake and irrigates lotus ponds and rice paddies in the lower reaches of the river.

Because it does not freeze over in winter, Sakata is a wintering site for waterfowl such as swans, geese and ducks. More than 3000 Tundra Swans winter here every year. They leave the lake early in the morning to feed in the surrounding rice paddies and come back in the evening to spend the night in the lake.

### Traditional Use of the Lake:

Historically, local farmers claimed water rights for Sakata as an irrigation lake for the rice paddies in the lower reaches, and managed the lake according to traditional management schemes. Today, the local community still takes charge of controlling water levels, and fishing rights are claimed by local fishermen. In the past, when people depended upon Sakata more heavily for irrigation, the whole community worked together for its maintenance.

It is an event known as the “Katabushin” that included some works such as channel repair, waterweed removal and dredging of soil and sand sediments.

However, since the 1970s when rice paddies were either abandoned by government policy or converted into residential sites due to urbanization, Sakata ceased to function as an upstream irrigation system. As a result, the local community lost the close ties to Sakata, and the “Katabushin” tradition was discontinued.

### Rebuilding Ties Between Sakata and the Community:

The Ramsar designation of Sakata in 1996 presented the local community an opportunity to restore the ties to 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 are collaborating to build a modern relationship with Sakata. For example, starting in 2003, the “Sakata Cleanup Activity” was introduced as a revival of the “Katabushin” where cleanups, dredging, and waterweed control are conducted by the local community, volunteers, and NGOs.



**[Prickly Water Lily *Euryale ferox*]** With a lily pad exceeding 1m in diameter, it is the largest annual in Japan. The lily pad is covered with thorns, and the red-purple flowers blooms breaking through the lily pad.

### Contact Information: looms

Niigata City Office  
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