

Lower Maruyama River and the surrounding rice paddies

Geographical Coordinates: 35°62'N, 134°84'E / Altitude: 0 - 20m / Area: 560ha / Major Type of Wetland: River, estuary, sand bank in a river, rice paddy, artificial Wetland / Designation: National Wildlife Protection Area including Special Protection Area, Special Zone of National Park, River area (River Law) / Municipalities Involved: Toyooka City, Hyogo Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: July 2012 / Ramsar Criteria: 2, 8

**River,
Rice
Paddy**



The lower reaches of the Maruyama River with river, rice paddies and artificial wetlands



An Oriental White Stork flying down in a pond



Farmers and a stork in rice paddies

General Overview:

The Ramsar site “Lower Maruyama River and the surrounding rice paddies” is located in Toyooka city in the north eastern part of Hyogo Prefecture in southern Honsyu. The keyword for this wetland is “Reintroduction of Storks” and the trait of this wetland is “a complex wetland of new life and renovated ecosystem”

The most distinctive feature of the site is that it includes 12km of the mainstream of the Maruyama River. The incline of the 68km long Maruyama River becomes extremely small when it approaches the sea. In addition, as the two hills at the river mouth almost block the river flow into the sea, the lower reaches of the river resemble a static pond and marsh. Because of this, the area has been blessed with a lot of aquatic life, but on the other hand, afflicted by repeated floods.

When the pace of the reintroduction of the storks accelerated, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism started to promote nature restoration along with reinforced flood control. Half of the sand bank that obstructed the river flow in the middle of the river was removed and a marsh was formed there. Many shoals were created on the river bed in the lower reaches of the river to establish a good habitat for Storks.

There are various types of wetland around the river, such as the Toshima Wetland for

“Hachigoro”, an artificial wetland constructed by Hyogo Prefecture and Toyooka City, and a marsh created from abandoned rice paddies by local people as well as rice paddies in use. The reintroduction project for Storks brought out a new sense of values to people’s life and culture. The whole community in this area is working hard to conserve the wetland.

Reintroduction of Storks:

The Oriental White Stork *Ciconia boyciana* is a large bird with a wingspan of 2m. It is recognized as endangered in the IUCN Red List. It became extinct in Japan in 1971, but a reintroduction project has been carried on in Toyooka city, the last habitat of this species in Japan. After artificial breeding and releasing, a population of approximately 70 storks has been established in the wild so far in 2014. It is one of the unique examples of reintroduction in the world because it was carried out in a human habitation. The reintroduction of the Oriental White Storks is creating a culture to welcome large birds in people’s life as well as restoring an environment that abounds with food resources for birds.

Rice from Stork Habitat:

The rice paddies are important feeding habitats for storks and some new practices of rice cultivation are promoted in Toyooka city. For example, farmers keep the rice

paddy flooded even in winter or delay the timing of midsummer drainage to sustain the metamorphosis and emergence of organisms in the paddy. As a result, a number of waterfowl visit the “winter flooded rice paddies” and the “stork-friendly rice” is sold at a high price as brand rice to bring about an economic benefit to farmers.

Tourism and Storks:

The reintroduced storks once visited a district called Tai. The incident stimulated the community in Tai to initiate an action to establish a wetland habitat in their fallow rice fields. The people also started a new movement for tourism to make the most of the local biodiversity, such as the formation of volunteer guide group called “An-girls”.

Contact Information:

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