

Higashiyoka-higata

Tidal Flat

Geographical Coordinates: 33°10'N, 103°15'E / Altitude: -2.5–1m/ Area: 218ha / Major Type of Wetland: Tidal flat / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area / Municipalities Involved: Saga City, Saga Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: May 2015 / Ramsar Criteria: 2, 4, 6



Aerial view of Higashiyoka-higata from the southwest



A colony of *Suaeda japonica* in beautiful autumn red

General Overview

Higashiyoka-higata is a tidal mudflat located at the northern most shore of Ariake Sea. It is an extensive tidal flat in the south of Higashiyoka Kantaku (Daiju area), a reclaimed land area in Saga City. It is a land between Honshoe River and Hattae River to the west of Saga Airport. It is a habitat for a large number of representative benthos of Ariake Sea, such as Great Blue-spotted Mudskipper, a fish species: *Odontamblyopus lacepedii* and Fiddler Crab. Some of the local fishermen still practice traditional fishing called, for example, Takappo and Mutsukake, which are unique to this area.

Ariake Sea

Ariake Sea is an inland sea surrounded by Kumamoto, Fukuoka, Saga and Nagasaki Prefectures. It has the largest tidal variation (max. 6m) in Japan. Although it is an approximately 100km long highly enclosed narrow inland sea, a large amount of nutrient rich earth and sand is accumulated from many rivers around it. The fine particles of the earth and sand are flung up by tidal force, circulate counterclockwise due

to the tidal current in the sea, settle down to accumulate when the current stops at high tide and form a mudflat when the sediments are left at low tide. Ariake Sea is an indispensable environment because it has 40% of the total tidal flat area existing in Japan.

One of the Largest Habitats for Migratory Birds

Higashiyoka-higata is one of the major stopover and wintering sites for migratory waterbirds in Japan, including some endangered species such as Saunders's Gull, Black-faced Spoonbill and Far Eastern Curlew. According to the record of shorebird count for Monitoring Site 1000, a survey conducted by the Ministry of the Environment, Japan, the tidal flat boasts the largest population of shorebirds in Japan and as many as 11,665 migratory shorebirds were counted in the spring of 2014.

Higashiyoka-kaigan Observation Deck on a sea embankment commands a view of the large colony of a plant species: *Suaeda japonica*, in beautiful autumn red with the extensive tidal flat in the background. The



Important habitat for migratory shorebirds (Photo by H. Yatsuki)



Saunders's Gull (Photo by H. Yatsuki)

walking trail along the seashore is a good place to observe countless life forms such as crabs and mudskippers at low tide. It is a breathtaking experience to see thousands of shorebirds fly over toward the wetland and forage intently for food on the mudflat during the migration season in spring and autumn.

Conservation Efforts for the Tidal Flat

Two groups were established recently, namely "Mudflat Expedition" organized mainly by local people and "Higashiyoka Ramsar Club" managed by Saga City. "Mudflat Expedition" has 30 members, who participate in such activities as bird watching and tidal flat watching. "Higashiyoka Ramsar Club" has 45 members including elementary and junior high school children and adults, who dedicate to actively monitor and study the species in the mudflat as their club activities. It is expected that the members will become leaders for nature conservation in the future.

Contact Information:

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