

Chapter 2-6

Birds

Abstract

A great many birds live in Shiga Prefecture because of the variety of environments ranging from the surrounding mountains to the large lake. Lake Biwa is an internationally important wetland for waterbirds. More than 150 thousand waterbirds inhabit the area in winter, and many birds, including the Little Grebe, the prefectural bird of Shiga, breed in the reed beds on the shores of Lake Biwa.

Keywords: Variety of environments, Waterbirds, Ramsar Convention, Reed bed, Migrants

1. Bird Species in Shiga

About 330 bird species live in Shiga Prefecture. Various kinds of birds make their homes in Shiga because of the wide variety of environments in the area such as mountains, hills, plains, paddy fields, irrigation ponds, and the large water bodies and attached lakes. Not only residential birds, but also many migrants breed, winter, or stopover in Shiga.

Two large raptors, the Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* and the Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis*, live in the mountainous areas of Shiga Prefecture. Mt. Hiei was designated as a national treasure as a bird breeding area in 1930.

The Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus*

cinereus, the Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*, and the Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca* breed in the paddy fields where Egrets such as the Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, the Great Egret *Ardea alba*, the Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*, and the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* are often observed foraging.

Breeding grounds of the Eurasian Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and the Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* have been recorded in the large reed beds on the shores of Lake Biwa or attached lakes. Lake Biwa is also the southernmost wintering area for the subspecies of the Bean Goose *Anser fabalis middendorffii* and the Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*.

Table 2-6-1 Eight waterbird species whose populations in Lake Biwa exceed the Ramsar Convention's criteria. *: 1% of the estimated total for the respective East Asian population. From "Waterfowl Population Estimates" 4th edition (Wetlands International 2006).

English name	Scientific name	1% level*	No. in Lake Biwa in 2007	Percentage in Lake Biwa
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera strepera</i>	7,500	9,973	1.3
Falcatad Duck	<i>Anas falcata</i>	350	1,645	4.7
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Anas penelope</i>	7,500	18,520	2.5
Common Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	3,000	36,385	12.1
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	2,500	28,518	11.4
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus cristatus</i>	375	1,176	3.1
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis nigricollis</i>	1,000	2,282	2.3
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo hanedae</i>	550	1,036	1.9

2. Waterbirds of Lake Biwa

Lake Biwa is an important habitat for waterbirds. Especially in winter, the shores of Lake Biwa are good foraging and resting sites for wintering birds. Roughly 150,000 waterbirds can be found in the area in January. The inhabitation of 20,000 birds or more is one of the criteria for internationally important wetlands defined by the Ramsar Convention. Moreover, eight waterbirds found on Lake Biwa also exceed the criterion of more than 1% of the estimated total for the respective East Asian populations. It is, therefore, clear that Lake Biwa is an internationally important site for waterbirds.



Fig. 2-6-1 The Great Crested Grebe

The three most abundant waterbirds in Lake Biwa in winter are the Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, the Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, and the Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*. Other species that are on the increase are the Gadwall *Anas strepera*, the Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*, and the Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*. These six species comprise roughly 3/4 of wintering waterbirds in Lake Biwa. On the other hand, the numbers of the Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, the Teal *Anas crecca*, and

the Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, the last of which is the prefectural bird of Shiga, are decreasing.

Changes have also been observed in birds breeding in the reed beds on the shores of Lake Biwa. The Little Grebe, the Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, the Eurasian Bittern, the Eastern Spot-billed Duck *Anas zonorhyncha*, the Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and the Eurasian Coot build nests in the reed beds near the surface of water or on the ground near water, while the Oriental Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus orientalis*, the Black-browed Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps*, and the Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis* build their nests attached to reed stems with reed leaves. One of the unique changes that have been observed of the waterbirds in Lake Biwa is that some of the Great Crested Grebes and the Eurasian Coots stayed year round and bred in Lake Biwa in the 1990's and 1980's respectively.



Fig. 2-6-2 The Eurasian Coot

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