

Chapter 4-14

The Ramsar Convention

Abstract

The Ramsar Convention is a treaty for the conservation and the wise use of internationally important wetlands and their fauna and flora. Currently, there are 168 member countries under the convention. Lake Biwa was certified as the ninth Ramsar site in Japan during the convention held in Kushiro, Hokkaido in the year 1993. Lake Nishinoko in Shiga Prefecture was added to the designated area in 2008.

Keywords: Ramsar, Waterfowl, Wetlands

1. The Ramsar Convention and the Conservation of Wetlands

“The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat” was concluded in Ramsar, Iran in 1971 and is commonly called The Ramsar Convention, named after the location.

As of September, 2013, there were 168 member countries under the treaty and 2,161 wetlands were registered under the Ramsar Convention.

(From the website of the Ramsar Secretariat)

2. Wetlands registered under the Ramsar Convention in Japan

Japan became a member country under the treaty in 1980 and Kushiro-shitsugen Marshland became the first Ramsar site in Japan. Currently, there are 46 Ramsar sites in Japan. Aside from lakes and reservoirs, a variety of wetlands are registered including swamps (e.g. Sarobetsu-genya Plain), coral reefs (e.g. Kerama-shoto Islands) and submerged forests (e.g. Notsuke Bay, Lake Furen).

3. Lake Biwa and the Ramsar Convention

Lake Biwa is home to over 60 endemic species and sub-species as well as a variety of biota said to comprise more than 10,000 species. Every year, over 60,000 waterfowls fly to the lake, one of the nation’s most popular wintering spots for migratory birds.

Lake Biwa was designated as the first quasi-national park in 1950 and various development activities have been established. Moreover, in 1971, the entire lake area was

designated as a wildlife sanctuary where the capture of wildlife is prohibited.

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4. Wise Use

Wetlands are important habitats for a variety of biota and are valuable resources that support our livelihoods.

The Ramsar Convention advocates “Wise Use” to maintain wetland ecosystems and promotes the sustainable use of their resources. In order to promote this wise use, the convention emphasizes elements such as interaction between stakeholders and the promotion of awareness-enhancing activities.

In Lake Biwa, traditional fishing methods such as “Eri-trap fishing” are practiced and visitors can enjoy sightseeing and leisure activities. Environmental education and learning activities are also provided to instill knowledge of the natural environment of the lake.

(Natural Environment Conservation Division, Shiga Prefectural Government)



Fig. 4-14-1
Observation of waterfowl at Lake Biwa