

*This sheet is compiled with data from the period that Kazakhstan was a USSR state.*

# Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

*Categories approved by Recommendation 4.7 of the Conference of the Contracting Parties.*

NOTE: It is important that you read the accompanying *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document before completing this form.

**1. Date this sheet was completed/updated:**

06-05-1997

**FOR OFFICE USE ONLY**

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Designation date

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Site Reference Number

**2. Country:**

Republic of Kazakhstan

**3. Name of wetland:** Lakes of the lower Turgay and Irgiz

**4. Geographical coordinates:** 48°42'N 62°11'E

**5. Altitude:** (average and/or max. & min.) no information

**6. Area:** (in hectares) 348,000 ha

**7. Overview:** (general summary, in two or three sentences, of the wetland's principal characteristics)

The wetland comprises a large group of lakes (some without outflow) in depressions, on a plateau dissected by a number of drainage channels. The lakes are shallow with a natural hydrological cycle of several years. Water levels are strongly fluctuating, resulting in the drying out of several rivers and streams during summer. The waters are very productive, providing a valuable food source for visiting wildfowl.

**8. Wetland Type** (please circle the applicable codes for wetland types as listed in Annex I of the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document.)

**marine-coastal:** A · B · C · D · E · F · G · H · I · J · K

**inland:** L · M · N · O · P · Q · R · Sp · Ss · Tp · Ts  
· U · Va · Vt · W · Xf · Xp · Y · Zg · Zk

**man-made:** 1 · 2 · 3 · 4 · 5 · 6 · 7 · 8 · 9

**Please now rank these wetland types by listing them from the most to the least dominant:** R Ss N 9 M Ts

**9. Ramsar Criteria:** (please circle the applicable criteria; see point 12, next page.)

1a · 1b · 1c · 1d | 2a · 2b · 2c · 2d | 3a · 3b · 3c | 4a · 4b

**Please specify the most significant criterion applicable to the site:** 3a, 2c

**10. Map of site included? Please tick *yes*  -or- *no***

(Please refer to the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document for information regarding desirable map traits).

**11. Name and address of the compiler of this form:**

**Please provide additional information on each of the following categories by attaching extra pages (please limit extra pages to no more than 10):**

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**12. Justification of the criteria selected under point 9, on previous page.** (Please refer to Annex II in the *Explanatory Note and Guidelines* document).

1b: The Lakes of the Lower Turgay and Irgiz are a good example of a wetland on the edge of an arid zone.

2a: The wetlands provide a moulting place for the globally threatened species *Pelecanus crispus*.

2c: About 25,000 pairs of birds are breeding at the wetland, including *Cygnus olor*, *Anas clypeata*, *A. strepera*, *A. fuligula*, *Tadorna tadorna* and *Fulica atra*. The site provides a very important moulting place for many different species of waterfowl.

3a: In favourable years the lakes support up to 1.5 million migrating waterfowl and waders including over 200,000 Anatidae. About 25,000 pairs of birds nest each year.

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**13. General location:** (include the nearest large town and its administrative region)

The lakes are situated in the Aktyubinsk district, north-east of the Aral Sea near the town of Kouilis in the north of Kazakhstan.

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**14. Physical features:** (e.g. geology, geomorphology; origins - natural or artificial; hydrology; soil type; water quality; water depth water permanence; fluctuations in water level; tidal variations; catchment area; downstream area; climate)

The wetland comprises a large group of lakes, formed in depressions on a plateau dissected by a number of drainage channels. Some of these channels are disused and in a state of disrepair. The water in the lakes is used for drainage purposes if the water levels allow that.

The shallow lakes have a natural hydrological cycle of several years. The close proximity of the Kyzyl-Kum Desert and the large evaporative surface area of the waterbodies contribute towards the fluctuating water levels and result in many lakes and streams drying out completely during the hot summer, leaving only stagnant pools among the sandbanks. The irrigation of the plateau is dependent on the intensity of seasonal floods and river inflow. The mineral contents and concentration of the lake and river water varies from flowing freshwater in the hillside rivers to saline or brackish waters in closed depression lakes.

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**15. Hydrological values:** (groundwater recharge, flood control, sediment trapping, shoreline stabilisation etc)

no information available

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**16. Ecological features:** (main habitats and vegetation types)

The lakes in the floodplain of the Turgay River and tributaries are fringed by reedbeds of *Phragmites communis*, and sedge associations predominate in the floodplain meadows. The changing succession of vegetation reflects the periodic fluctuation in the water level of the lakes. The waters are highly productive providing a valuable food source for the visiting waterfowl.

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**17. Noteworthy flora:** (indicating, e.g., which species/communities are unique, rare, endangered or biogeographically important, etc)

no information available

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**18. Noteworthy fauna:** (indicating, e.g., which species are unique, rare, endangered, abundant or biogeographically important; include count data, etc.)

In favourable years up to 1.5 million migrating waterfowl and waders have been recorded including some 200,000 Anatidae such as greylag goose (*Anser anser*), white-fronted goose (*A. albifrons*), lesser white-fronted goose (*A. erythropus*), the less common red-breasted goose (*Branta ruficollis*), several thousand wigeon (*Anas penelope*) and diving ducks such as mallard (*A. platyrhynchos*), teal (*A. crecca*), garganey (*A. querquedula*), pintail (*A. acuta*), pochard (*Aythya ferina*) and goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*). Other birds include Siberian crane (*Grus leucogeranus*), white spoonbill (*Plateala leucorodia*) and great egret (*Egretta alba*).

There are up to 25,000 pairs of nesting birds including mute swan (*Cygnus olor*), shoveler (*Anas clypeata*), gadwall (*A. strepera*), tufted duck (*A. fuligula*), shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*), coot (*Fulica atra*), teal and pochard. The wetland is a moulting site for several thousand birds including greylag goose, coot, greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) and Dalmatian pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*).

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**19. Social and cultural values:** (e.g. fisheries production, forestry, religious importance, archaeological site etc.)

The site is used for restricted commercial fishing.

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**20. Land tenure/ownership of:**

(a) site: State of Kazakhstan

(b) surrounding area: no information available

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**21. Current land use:**

(a) site: Natural resources are exploited within the site, but in a restricted way in accordance with conservation of the wetland as a waterfowl habitat. There is some unspecified agriculture, limited commercial fishing and a little harvesting of rushes.

(b) surroundings/catchment: no information available

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**22. Factors (past, present or potential) adversely affecting the site's ecological character, including changes in land use and development projects:**

(a) at the site: The overall conditions of this wetland are very much dependent on the amount of rainfall per year and over the years. The ecological balance of this wetland is therefore very sensitive to changes in precipitation. On a regular basis there are problems with the water supply of the site. Anthropogenic factors play a major role in the causes of these problems. The most important human cause of low water levels is the construction of barrages upstream, in the Turgay River and its tributaries. The barrages cut off the water supply to the Ramsar site. In order to maintain the original ecological character of the site, it would be necessary to remove the barrages, or to release water through them. This requires the cooperation between two provinces, since the Ramsar site is situated in the Aktyubinsk Oblast, and the barrages are located in the Turgayski Oblast. The reduction of water levels not only affects the wildlife (especially waterfowl), but also human populations and their traditional fisheries and cattle rearing.

Other threats to the ecological character of the site are overgrazing by the large numbers of cattle and sheep that are raised in the area. The large number of grazing livestock exerts heavy pressure on the vegetation and ecological balance of this fragile area on the edge of steppe and desert. The site is protected as a Zakaznik, a nature sanctuary, where hunting and fishing are controlled. It has been proposed to upgrade the site to a Zapovednik, a state nature reserve, to reduce the pressure on the natural resources. The establishment of a Zapovednik would also make it possible to problems of reed-cutting and over-exploitation of *Artemia* vegetation for hay.

(b) around the site: no information available

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**23. Conservation measures taken:** (national category and legal status of protected areas - including any boundary changes which have been made; management practices; whether an officially approved management plan exists and whether it has been implemented)

At the lakes of the lower Turgay and Irgiz hunting is prohibited. The entire site is designated a Zapovednik, a nature reserve. Exploitation of natural resources is controlled in accordance with the conservation of the wetland as a waterfowl habitat. Commercial fishing is restricted, motorboats are prohibited and state purchasing of rushes harvested from the wetlands has stopped.

The site has been placed on the Montreux Record because of problems with the water supply due to upstream dams.

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**24. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:** (e.g. management plan in preparation; officially proposed as a protected area etc.)

In areas where agriculture is permitted, restrictions are planned to conserve waterfowl habitat.

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**25. Current scientific research and facilities:** (e.g. details of current projects; existence of field station etc.)

The biology and migration of birds has been studied by ornithologists from the Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan.

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**26. Current conservation education:** (e.g. visitors centre, hides, information booklet, facilities for school visits etc.)

no information available

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**27. Current recreation and tourism:** (state if wetland is used for recreation/tourism; indicate type and frequency/intensity)

no information available

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**28. Jurisdiction:** (territorial e.g. state/region and functional e.g. Dept of Agriculture/Dept. of Environment etc.)

Main Department of Zapovedniks and Game Management

Republic of Kazakhstan

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**29. Management authority:** (name and address of local body directly responsible for managing the wetland)

Main Department of Zapovedniks and Game Management

Republic of Kazakhstan

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**30. Bibliographical references:** (scientific/technical only)

Anon. (1980) National Report of the USSR for the *Conference on the Conservation of Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat, Cagliari, Italy, 24-29 November 1980*.

Berezovsky, V. (1980). Spring migration of birds of the lower Turgay river. In: *Migrtsii ptits v Azii* (Bird Migration in Asia), Dushanbe, pp. 140-153.

IUCN (1987). *Directory of Wetlands of International Importance*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland

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Please return to: **Ramsar Convention Bureau, Rue Mauverney 28, CH-1196 GLAND, Switzerland**

Telephone: +41 22 999 0170 • Fax: +41 22 999 0169 • e-mail: [ramsar@hq.iucn.org](mailto:ramsar@hq.iucn.org)