



MONGOLIA



MONGOLIAN  
PROTECTED  
AREAS



**WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL  
IMPORTANCE**

**TERKHIIN TSAGAAN LAKE**



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## WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE

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# TERKHIIN TSAGAAN LAKE

2022



## CONVENTION ON THE WETLANDS OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE ESPECIALLY AS WATERFOWL HABITAT



### What is the RAMSAR Convention?

The Convention on the Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl habitat was first adopted on a meeting held in the Iranian city of Ramsar on February 2, 1971. Governments and non-governmental organizations from countries around the world negotiated and adopted the global treaty concerned about increasing loss and degradation of the wetland habitat for migratory water birds, one of the most vulnerable and irreparable ecosystems on the planet, due to a number of factors such as global warming, climate change and improper human activities and recognized the wetland ecosystem must be protected. The Convention is so named for the city Ramsar in Iran, where the treaty came into force. As of 2021, there were 172 Contracting Parties (member countries) and a total of 2,431 wetlands covering 254,620,630 hectares of international importance in List in the Appendix to the Ramsar Convention.



### What is a purpose of the Ramsar Convention?

A purpose of the Convention is to provide a framework for national and international cooperation for conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources. Its activities are regulated by inter-governmental treaties and agreements. A primary reason for global signing the international Convention is to recognize that water fowl in their seasonal migrations do transcend frontiers and so should be regarded as an international resource while considering that the wetlands,

their key habitat, must be protected globally through the Convention.



### What is a wetland?

Wetlands are basically transition zones between terrestrial and water environments, where a specific ecosystem is created, supported, and interacted by water flows, soil nutrient cycles, and solar energy.

The Ramsar Convention uses a broad definition of the wetlands which include all lakes, rivers, streams, and ponds and their floodplains, wet grasslands, peatland, oasis, estuaries, deltas, mineral water bodies, tidal flats, mangroves, and other coastline areas, coral reefs, and all human-made sites such as fish ponds, rice paddies, reservoirs, and salt pans. The definition under the Convention encompasses a variety of the wetlands and encourages preservation, protection, and wise (balanced) use of the globally significant biodiversity thereof through enhanced wetland conservation framework.



### How are areas designated and listed as the Ramsar sites?

Countries in the world signed the Convention do commit to designate and nominate suitable wetlands within their territories for the List of Wetlands of International Importance ("Ramsar List") based on the following nine criteria:

A

Sites containing representative, rare or unique wetland types

#### Criterion 1

Sites contain representative, rare or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biographic region;

**B**

Sites of international importance for conserving biological diversity

*Criteria based on species and ecological communities*

**Criterion 2** Sites support vulnerable, endangered, or critically endangered species or threatened ecological communities

**Criterion 3** Sites support populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region

**Criterion 4** Sites support plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provide refuge during adverse conditions

*Specific criteria based on water birds:*

**Criterion 5** Sites regularly support 20,000 or more individuals of a species or sub-species of water birds

**Criterion 6** Sites regularly support 1% or more of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of water birds

*Specific criteria based on fish*

**Criterion 7** Sites support a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and /or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity

**Criterion 8** Sites are an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend

*Specific criteria based on other taxa*

**Criterion 9** Sites regularly support 1% or more of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species.



**Why do wetlands need to be protected?**

There are numerous types of wetlands existing worldwide. Each type of wetland provides habitat for thousands of species of terrestrial and aquatic plants and animals. Wetlands are valuable for flood protection, water quality improvement, and riparian zone and shoreline erosion control. Also, wetlands have recreational, aesthetic, and cultural values.



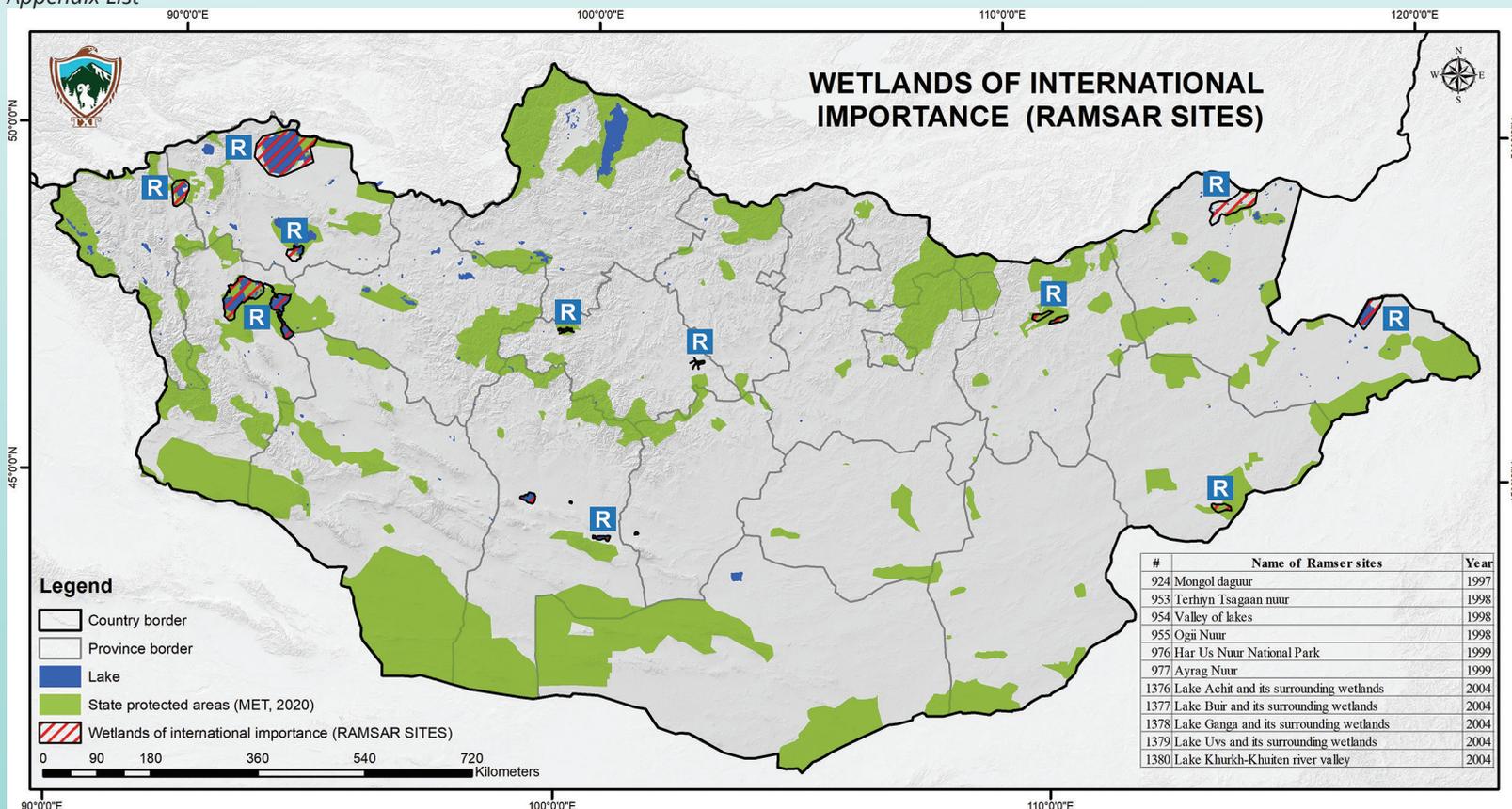
## MONGOLIA AND THE RAMSAR CONVENTION

Mongolia officially signed the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl habitat on April 8, 1998 and became the 104<sup>th</sup> Contracting Party. The Contracting Parties to the Convention act as its policy making unit represented by the Governments of the countries signed. Thus, the officially recognized body representing Mongolia at the Ramsar Convention is the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

As of 2021, Mongolia has included a total of 1,439,530 ha of its 11 designated areas in the Ramsar Convention Appendix List. Three sites out of 11 Ramsar sites in Mongolia are still outside the national PA network (*Table 1*) while the rest are included in the national PA system and conservation activities are undertaken in accordance with their protection status in the PA network.

As the Contracting Party to the Convention, Mongolia commits to implement the wetlands conservation management, submit its performance progress reports, and regularly take part in implementation of the Convention activities under its commitment to the Convention.

*Map 1. Sites in Mongolia designated in the Ramsar Convention Appendix List*



# TERKHIIN TSAGAAN LAKE AND ITS WETLAND

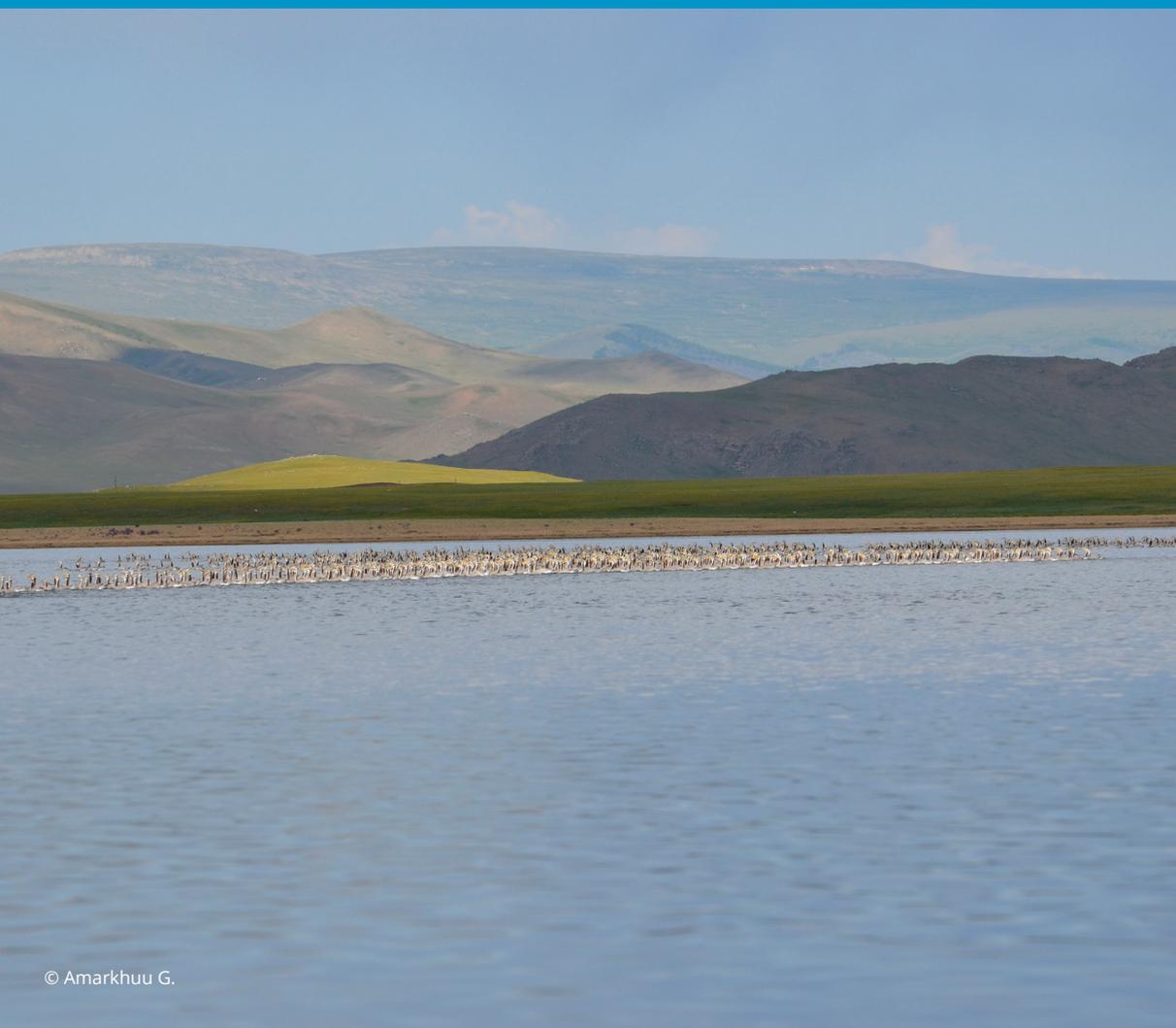
Name: **Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake**

Ramsar site code: 953

Area: 6,110 ha

Location: 48°10'N 099°43'E

Elevation: 2,060 m



## IMPORTANCE OF WETLANDS IN CENTRAL MONGOLIA

A primary role wetlands play is that they act as an ecological regulator for maintaining water regimes and wildlife (flora and fauna) habitats. The region lies along two (routes of Central Asian and East Asian-Australian-Asian flyways) out of eight major worldwide flyways for migratory birds travelling between Africa-India, South Asia and Siberia and Europe. As such, the Lake and its wetlands in the region has international importance. Thus, it is the strategically important region supporting major lakes and their wetlands, where migratory birds do stopover and rest during their seasonal migrations. One of these lakes and wetlands in the region is Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake and its wetland.

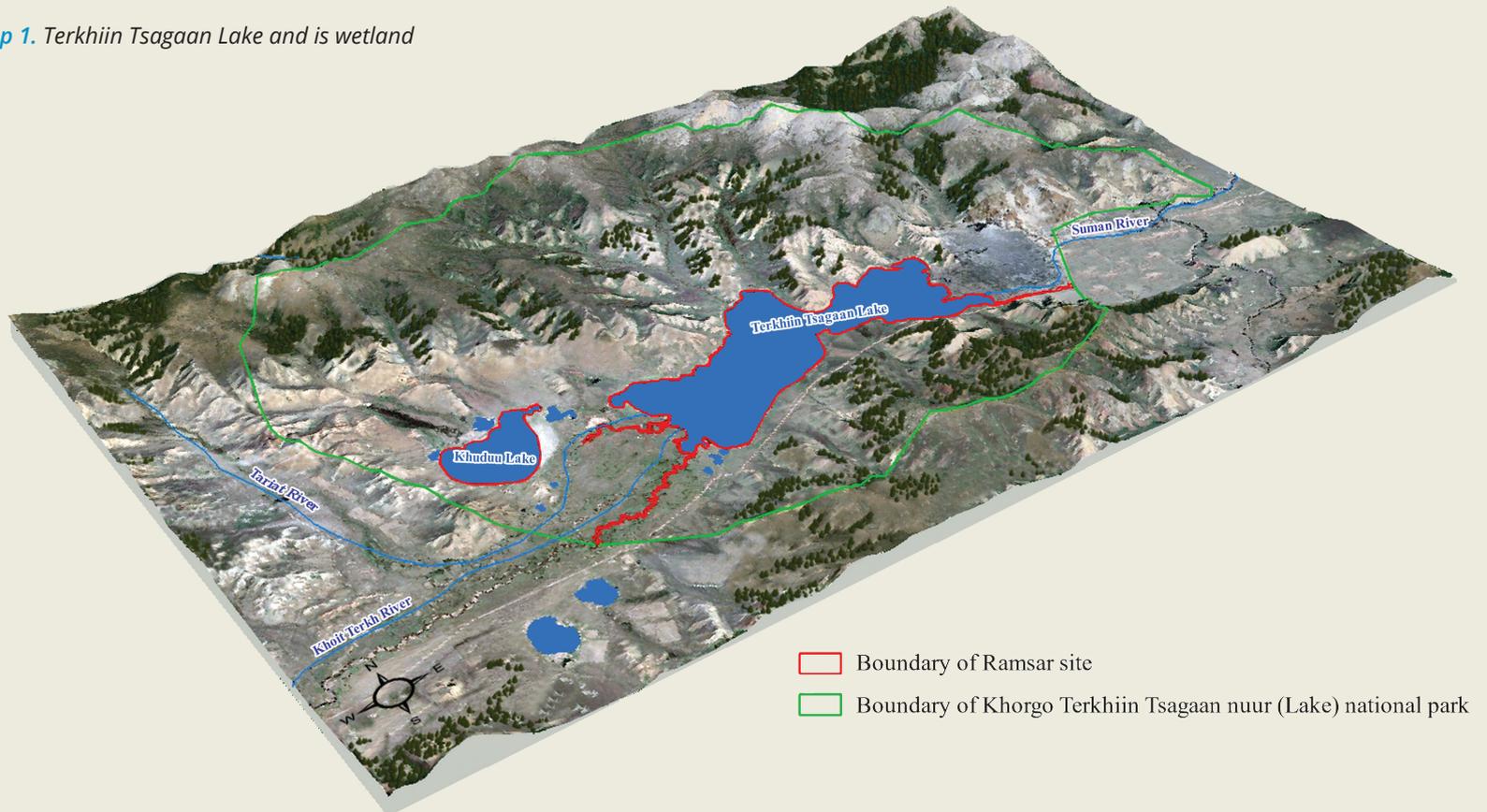
## LOCATION

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake lies in a valley of Suman River, a tributary stream to Selenge River in the central part of Khangay Range. Located in a territory of Tariat sub-province of Arkhangay province, the Lake is at 180 km in the northwest from Tsetserleg town, a centre of Arkhangay province and at 670 km from Ulaanbaatar, the Capital City of Mongolia. It is the oligotrophic freshwater lake formed due to volcanic eruption. The Lake is surrounded by hills with herbaceous plants and mountains with sparse larch forests. According to the administration and territorial unit division, the Lake belongs to a territory of Arkhangay province.

## JUSTIFICATION FOR LISTING AS THE RAMSAR CONVENTION SITE

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake and its wetland are favourable nesting, stopover, and resting grounds for migratory waterfowls during their migrations. The species, whose populations occurring at the Lake are estimated at 1% and above against their global populations during their migrations, include great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*), ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), common merganser (*Mergus merganser*), and northern lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*). There were 2,100 individuals of bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*) molting recorded at the Lake. Such specific characteristics of the Lake and its wetland meeting I and III out of nine criteria for designation of Ramsar Convention sites made Lake and its wetland to be officially designated as the Ramsar Convention site in June, 1998.

Map 1. Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake and its wetland





## HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS OF TERKHIIN TSAGAAN LAKE AND ITS WETLAND

Over 7,700 years ago, a volcano erupted, immense basalt flow blocked and pushed forward Suman River, and then Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake was formed. The Lake is inflowed by Terkh River and some other small streams such Nariin, Shanaat, Uvurt in the north and by the small streams such as Ult, Elst, Ar Surt, Arhar Chuluut in the south. There is only one river -Suman outflowing from the Lake. Suman River meets Chuluut River and then inflows into Selenge River. In the north of the Lake, there are some bays such as Shanaat, Ikh Mukhar, and Uvur Sort, Ar Uzuur, and Uvgun Khad (Old Man Rock) and there is a key bay Jooroi in the south.

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake is a tectonic lake located in an intermountainous depression. Vicinity of the Lake has relatively moist climate which is influenced by forest steppe mountains in central part of Khangay Range and the unique intermediate landscape containing distinct characteristics of adjacent zones. A total area of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake is 6,100 hectares; 16 km in length; six km in width; 20 m in depth; and its shoreline is 66 km.

There are some islands in the Lake. The largest island "Chandmani Hill" is about 30 m in height above the Lake's water surface and is made of the limestone formed in the Paleozoic Era. There are some small lakes located in the west of the Lake and the largest lake is Khuduu Lake. The wetland in the west of the Lake provide a main stopover, nesting, and breeding site for migratory waterfowls.

## INCLUSION OF THE WETLANDS IN THE NATIONAL PROTECTED AREA NETWORK

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake is entirely included in Khorgo-Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake National Park covered a total of 76,893 hectares of a valley of Suman River, Khorgo volcano crater, and Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake located in the central part of Khangay Range. To protect these naturally scenic areas along with their biodiversity, the National Park was established by the State Ikh Khural (the Parliament) Resolution No. 26 in 1995. Conservation management of Terkhkiin Tsagaan Lake National Park is responsible by Khangay Nuruu National Park Administration. The park is one of key tourist destinations in Mongolia for either domestic or foreign travelers. Wetland of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake is entirely included in the National Park.



# BIODIVERSITY

## MAMMAL

Forested areas in the vicinity of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake are distributed 22 mammalian species including red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*), Siberian marmot (*Marmota sibirica*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), grey wolf (*Canis lupus*), Siberian weasel (*Mustela sibirica*), long-tailed ground squirrel (*Spermophilus undulatus*), roe deer (*Capreolus pygargus*), tundra vole (*Microtus oeconomus*), Brandt's vole (*Lasiopodomys brandti*), Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*), Pallas' cat (*Felis manul*), wolverine (*Gulo gulo*). The species recorded include the three species (regionally endangered) and six species (near threatened) (IUCN Red List Criteria).





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## BIRD

There are 244 bird species of 127 genera of 47 families of 17 orders recorded in wetland of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake which accounts for about 48 percent of the total bird species recorded in Mongolia. According to their occurrence, there are 132 nesting migrant species, 58 resident species, 37 transit migrant species, two summering species, 11 wintering species, and four 4 vagrant species recorded. Moreover, the species recorded include 11 very rare species and 3 rare species listed in the Mongolian Red Book; three and 27 species listed in CITES Appendices 1 and 2 respectively; and 11 and 22 species of birds listed in the CMS Appendices I and II, respectively.

Globally threatened species recorded include the steppe eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), swan goose (*Anser cygnoid*), Eurasian curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Sake falcon (*Falco cherrug*), and Cinereous vulture (*Aegypius monachus*). Migratory waterfowls do nest, stopover, and rest in the western part of the Lake. This section includes a flat lava island, where the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*), and velvet scoter (*Melanitta fusca*) do breed. The great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and *Larus mongolus* do breed on Chandmani Hill island, the largest island in the Lake.



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## FISH, AMPHIBIAN, AND REPTILE

There are 12 fish species recorded in Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake. Amongst, the Prussian carp (*Carassius gibelio*), Amur catfish (*Silurus asotus*), burbot (*Lota lota*), European perch (*Perca fluviatilis*), and Amur pike (*Esox reichertii*) are regionally vulnerable according to the IUCN Red List criteria. There are

also lenok (*Brachymystax lenok*) (near threatened), Artic grayling (*Thymallus arcticus*) and ide (*Leuciscus idus*) are recorded. From the amphibians, the Mongolian toad (*Bufo raddei*) is recorded and from the reptiles, the Central Asian viper (*Agkistrodon halys*) is recorded.



## PLANT

There are four species (as rare and very rare species) out of the species recorded in the vicinity of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake listed in the Red Book of Mongolia. According to the botanical-geographical province, the Lake's vicinity lies in the mountainous forest steppe in Khangay-Baikal Lake which is dominant by high mountainous and wetland as well water plant species. Mountains are distributed by Siberian larch (*Larix sibirica*) and Siberian pine (*Pinus sibirica*).

The water plants such as *Potamogeton filiformis*, and *Butomus umbellatus* are abundant at depths of 30-50 cm along the Lake shores while the *Lemna trisulca* floats on the Lake's water surface. The species such as *Myriophyllum spicatum*, *Potamogeton praelongus*, and *Chara spp.* are grown in deeper parts (at least at 2.5 m depth) in the Lake. The rare species such as *Potamogeton perfoliatus*, *Potamogeton praelongus*, *Potamogeton pusillus* are grown in the Lake.

Vicinity of the Lake are abundant by the species such as *Carex duriuscula*, *Glaux maritime*, *Potentilla anserina*, *Primula nutans*, *Halerpestes sarmentosa*, and *Hordeum brevisubulatum*. Moreover, the medicinal plant species such as *Rosa acicularis* and *Thymus gobicus* and the *Leontopodium ochroleucum*, *Gentiana azurea*, *Gentiana algida* are grown; and the wild berries such as *Grossula acicularis*, *Vaccinium vitisidaea*, *Vaccinium uliginosum*, *Ribes altissimum* and *Ribes nigrum* are grown.

About 20 percent of the Lake do support water macro-phyte. In comparing to the at in Ugii Lake, water plants in Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake are less developed, but the same species (e.g. *Butomus umbellatus*) are found. In the phytoplankton, the cyano algae is dominant in the Lake in summertime.



## CULTURE AND TRADITION

The historical and cultural monuments and artefacts dated to the Bronze and Early Iron Periods are found in the vicinity of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake. The historical monuments such as petroglyphs, rock wall paintings, ancient burial sites, human and deer stones and remains or ruins of ancient settlements related to the Mongolian Empire Period are abundant in the vicinity of the Lake.

An ancient burial site is in Tariat Am in the western valley of Tariat River which is at about 34 km in the west from the centre of Tariat sub-province. Sizes of the burial site include 41 m inside depth, 130 m of radius, 66 m outside depth; and 2.6 m width; and burial sites, human stones, and worship, offering, and memorial sites are found in Dund Nariin Am and Tsagaan Khad Am at 24 km in the west from the centre of Tariat sub-province; in the west of Dadag Bulag, in the east of Khuduu Lake, and in the north of Magjaan Khooloi. Lately, some historical and cultural sites were illegally dug and damaged by people to make money so public attitudes and awareness on historical and cultural sites and their safeguarding need to be increased. At the same time, traditional behaviours to protect natural, historical, and cultural sites need to be encouraged.

There is a rock “Uvgun Khad” (Old Man Rock) on the northern shore of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake. A legend tells about this rock: a man’s daughter, having recovered from her illness, was forced to marry a rich man. The daughter sank and died in the lake against this marriage. The old man, father of the daughter, missed his daughter, sat on the shore every day, and then turned into the rock.



## OTHER APPLICABLE INTERNATIONAL TREATIES AND CONVENTIONS

### Important Bird Areas in Mongolia (MN031):

The globally threatened species (IUCN) recorded at the Lake and its wetland include swan goose (*Anser cygnoides*) (VU), Pallas' fish eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*) (EN), Saker falcon (*Falco cherrug*) (EN), Eurasian curlew (*Numenius arquata*) (NT), red-necked stint (*Calidris ruficollis*) (NT), curlew sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*) (NT), and common pochard (*Aythya ferina*) (VU). The species whose populations are estimated at 1% and more during their migrations, include great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*), ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), common goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*), common merganser (*Mergus merganser*), and northern lapwing (*Vanellus vanellus*). Based on these findings, a total of 21,072 ha of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake is designated as a part of IBAs in the country.

### East Asian-Australian Flyway Network (EAAF041):

Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake and its wetland provide a stopover and resting place for over 27,000 individuals of waterfowls annually. These species include the globally threatened and near threatened species such as Pallas' fish eagle (*Haliaeetus leucoryphus*), white-naped crane (*Antigone virgo*), falcated duck (*Mareca falcata*) and white-eyed pochard (*Aythya nyroca*). Also, the species, whose populations are 1% and above against their global populations, include the ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) (2.9%): 1757 individuals; graylag goose (*Anser anser*) (0.3%, 500 individuals); great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) (0.43%, 520 individuals); bar-headed goose (*Anser indicus*) (0.27 %, 154 individuals); ruddy shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) (1%, 647 individuals); common pochard (*Aythya ferina*) (0.28 %, 1,200 individuals); and tufted duck (*Aythya fuligula*) (0.3%, 1,678 individuals). Thus, the lake and its wetland is included in the EAA Network in 2016.



## THREAT

In 1995, a total covering area of Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake was 7950.0 ha, but it was declined to 7440.1 ha in 2015 (lost by 509.9 ha or 6.4% within 2 decades). As the Lake's water area was reduced, the numbers of migratory birds recorded at the Lake and its wetland were also reduced by 23.5% within the two decades. At the same time, the area covered by sand was also expanded by 39.4%; the deteriorated land was increased by 1.44 times in the decades. Furthermore, the Lake water has been heavily polluted and vicinities of the Lake have been overgrazed and consequently the sandy areas are getting expanded.

There are numerous natural springs (e.g. Bulat, Sort, Nariin Ekh, Tsagaan Bulag, Tsagaan Tsohio, Dadga, Elst Bulag) and mineral water bodies found around the Lake which are a main water source for human and animals. However, sources of these springs and water bodies are not protected (e.g. by livestock enclosure) and their waters have been polluted and some of them have disappeared. Increasing loss and pollution of the Lake's water may lead to loss of about 20 water plant species, 36 plankton species, 20 benthic species, and over 10 vascular plants recorded in the Lake. Terkhiin Tsagaan Lake is inflowed by more than 10 small streams, but is drained by one river Suman. Self-purification capacity of the Lake is obviously limited due to its location in a small depression enclosed by mountains. This becomes a main cause of the Lake's water pollution on one hand.

A survey on land cover changes conducted by the park administration showed that forested areas were 13526.4 ha in 1995, but this amount was reduced to 5752.6 ha in 2015 (lost by 7773.8 ha or 57.4%) for two decades. Main causes of these declines included forest fire and tree cutting (the highest) and consequently, the forest steppe is likely to be replaced by a steppe. As a result, the region has become vulnerable to outbreaks of damageable pests and human activities.

# CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT AND COOPERATION

Administration of Khangay Nuruu National Park cooperates with local governments, specialized inspection offices, research and academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, environmental conservation associations, international projects and programmes, and local community groups with regard to research, monitoring, training, conservation, patrolling, and public awareness activities.

WWF Mongolia Programme Office and UNDP/MoEGD Strengthening of Protected Area Network Project was implemented in the National Park for 2011-2015. Under the MoEGD / Biodiversity and Adaptation to Climate Change, the park administration has central regional information centre, where public awareness and capacity building activities on improved PA conservation and other related topics are

regularly organized for rangers, local residents and community groups as planned.

The park administration proposes and implements a management plan for the National Park through close cooperation with the local stakeholders e.g. local authorities and communities through exchange of views and multi stakeholder discussions and consultations. Based on the environmental assessments and surveys conducted between 1995 and 2015 and results of public consultations, the park administration had defined the park's target conservation values: the lakes, natural springs, forest and non-timber forest products, and historical and cultural monuments, which are reflected in the management plan for the National Park.



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