

Preview of the No. 1148 Ramsar Site on the Ordos upland of western Inner Mongolia

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The Taolimiao-Alashan Nur (T-A Nur), of about 10 km² a brackish lake located on the Ordos upland of western Inner Mongolia, northern China, used to be not only supporting the largest breeding colony of the Relict Gull (*Larus relictus*) but also being a very good sample of the carrying capacity of a semi-desert wetland locality for those waterbirds, both breeders and migrating vagrants, of the region, and, therefore, the T-A Nur was recognized, in 2002, the No. 1148 Ramsar Site of the world.

During the 1990s, highest records of the breeding waterbirds at T-A Nur included over 3600 nests of the Relict Gull, some 75 nests of the Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*), over 1150 nests of the Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*), about 100 nests of the Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), some 760 nests of the Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*), and, in the migrating season in fall, with over 20000 Whooper Swans (*Cygnus cygnus*), more than 1000 Demoiselle Cranes (*Grus virgo*), about 2000 Swan Geese (*Anser cygnoides*), over 10000 Greylag and Bean Geese (*A. anser* & *A. fabalis*), over 1000 Common Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), a few Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) and Eurasian Spoonbills (*Platalea leucorodia*), together with over 40000 other waterfowl birds, and, moreover,

with the records also of the Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), the White-headed Duck (*Oxyura leucocephala*), and the Oriental Stork (*Ciconia boyciana*), being very rare to the region.

The drought, occurred in the very beginning of this century, caused T-A Nur habitat in degradation dramatically, whilst those dams, built on the upper branch of Jigou river, a short seasonal river but providing the main water supply to the lake, stopped the water, making the lake totally and entirely dried over in spring of 2008. Then, though the rainfall in 2008 was remarkably higher than normal led to some 2 km² of water remaining there from the autumn season 2008 till May 2009, few birds could be found appearing around the lake, showing badly the lack of aquatic creatures in the water for those waterbirds to feed on.

In late October 2009, results of our survey to the T-A Nur and its surroundings revealed that the water got much reduced in those small lakes around the T-A Nur with less migrating waterfowl stopping there, whilst, on the contrary, the T-A Nur showed some appearance of recovery – on October 27, we counted over 5500 Whooper Swans, some 500 Swan Geese, a few Bean Geese, and over 5500 birds of other waterfowl including the Ruddy Shelduck, Mallard, Spot-billed Duck, Golden-eye, Coot, Crested Grebe, etc., with over 10000 waterbirds in total, then, on October 30, a bit more birds found there. This is almost to reach to half of the highest carrying capacity of the T-A Nur, as far recorded, under an area unit (per km²) of the season.

Our survey also revealed that, though those dams on the upper branch of the river, they are 14 in total, had not yet totally and thoroughly got moved, the

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Jigou river could have already, eventually and eventually, given some water supply to the lake in late summer to autumn season in 2009. And, consequently, if all those dams could get totally moved before the spring season 2010, the T-A Nur might,

quite possibly, get much better a situation in autumn of the year, as if the rainfall to be normal.

Anyway, we much look forward to seeing the process of recovery of such a vital wetland habitat for the waterbirds, as it used to be.

对内蒙古鄂尔多斯高原全球第 1148 号 国际重要湿地的展望

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