Ecological character

Within the wetland borders the following types of habitats are pointed out: fresh and sub-saline lakes with wide reed bushes and abundant submerged vegetation - 20-21 thousand ha (61 species recorded, 43 – nesting), sores and salty lakes – about 9 thousand ha (10-15 species), open lakes shores (47 species, 8-9 nesting), swampy water meadows (shallow waters overgrown with carex and cough grass) and water meadows – 7-8 thousand ha, river beds and artificial ponds. Local habitats are small swamps in places of egress of fresh ground waters with elements of boreal flora.

Thick reed bushes of border and border-curtain type with a wide central broad (reach) or of mosaic type with lots of smaller broads (reaches). Bulb-bulrush and reed bushes (*Phragmites australis, Bolboshoenus maritimus*) also take a significant area. There are bushes of hornwort (*Ceratophyllum demersum*) and pond grass (*Potamogeton*). The colony of cattail (*Typha angustifolia*) and club-rush (*Scirpus lacustris*) are typical for shallow waters mostly in parts flooded in springtime, at external edge of reed bushes. Dry bottoms get overgrown with pigweeds (*Chenopodiaceae*) and water pepper (*Polygonym hydropiper*).

Low terraces of fresh lake hollows are occupied with different kinds of crop and crop-carex (*Cyperaceae*) meadows, some places also have reed and bulrush alternating with absinthial and potassnik (*Kalidium schrenkianum)* communities. Raw crop meadows get waterlogged in wet years. Significant areas are occupied with halophytic vegetation, mainly (glasswort *(Salicornia europaea),* Sea Lavender *(Limonium suffruticosum),* portashnik (*Kalidium schrenkianum),* halophyte shrub (*Halocnemum strobilaceum),* Ofaiston (*Ofaiston monandrum),* Halimione Bgorodavchataya *(Halimione verrucifera*), sometimes with reed. Single trees of Russian olive (*Elaeagnus angustifolia)* sometimes forming entire bushes, and blocks of tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*) grow in some areas along the coastline of the lakes.

Marsh vegetation (Glasswort *(Salicornia europaea),* Clubne-kamish Morskoy (*Bolboshoenus maritimus),* Sveda Stelyuschaya *(Suaeda prostrate),* Sveda Rozhkonosaya *(S. corniculata*) prevails around salty lakes in combination with halophytic meadows and blocks of tamarisk bushes and Nitraria (*Nitraria shoberi).*

A complicated dynamics of vegetation determined by changes of lake watering is observed for water areas as well as for the coastline part.

Of other habitat types the major area is occupied by steppe formations. On the high terrace of the bottom of Turgay depression a complex of steppe vegetation is widely distributed, i.e. absinthial and crop (sheep fescue) communities, sometimes in combination with cough-grass meadows and reed bushes in lower areas. Big areas are occupied by communities of silver sagebrush (*Atriplex cana)* and complexes of Levant Wormseed (*Artemisia pauciflora),* silver sagebrush (*Atriplex cana),* Russian wildrye (*Psathyrostachys juncea)* as well as steppe halophytic motley grasses (quackgrass (*Elytrigia repens),* Kolosnyak Vetvistiy – (*Leymus ramosus),* tuberous Jerusalem sage *(Phlomis tuberose),* Sea Lavender *(Limonium gmelinii*). On the border with Naurzum pine forest motley-grass and sandy mat- grass steppes are broadly distributed.

Forest types of habitats are represented by pines of Naurzum pine forest and birch and pine forest outliers at places of outflow of ground waters along the plateau slopes.

On the plateau surface crop and crop - absinthial (Kovil Lessinga (*Stipa lessingiana),* Kovil Sareptskiy (*S. sareptana),* Volga fescue (*Festuca valesiaca),*

Solonechnik Tatarskiy *(Galatella tatarica)*, Polin Selitryanaya (*Artemisi nitrosa)*, Romashnik *(Pyrethrum achilleifolium*) steppes, sometimes with bushes (Iberian spirea *(Spiraea hypericifolia*) prevail.