

Ecological character

The most valuable places of habitat within the given lands are the deltaic lakes such as Tushchebas, Kamyshlybash, Akshatau, Karakol, Laikol, Zhalanashkol, Sarteren, Shomshykol, etc. The most part of the above lakes are fed directly from the Syrdarya River. Many of the above listed lakes have developed reedbeds. The lake water level is unsteady or variable and depends upon seasonal changes in the Syrdarya water level.

The Syrdarya flood-plain is open along the most part of its length and only in some places (especially near the river outlet) there are small areas of willow (*Salix* sp.) and Russian Olive (*Elaeagnus oxycarpa*) and tugays (riparian forests). There are reed-beds which grow on the flood-plains surrounding these deltaic lakes. There are also the thick Salt Trees/Russian Salt Tree (*Halimodendron*) areas and water sedge-grass scrub meadows.

The Aral Sea shore is now changing its configuration due the rise in water level. In general, its coasts are sandy and slightly/gently sloping. From the west such coasts have chink steeps. The terrain which surrounds the lakes and delta is arid. Some hilly areas can be observed in certain places. The flora is poor and is characteristic of arid lands, various flood-plain type plant communities are found only at the river mouth. Some areas are occupied by saxaul and tamarix brush-woods.

Due to the territory peculiarities, the main representatives of the fauna community are birds of watermarsh complex such as grebes, pelicans, cormorants, herons, geese, swans, ducks, waders, gulls, terns.

Birds of prey are rather common here during nesting and migrations. Like an oasis in a desert, this territory is attractive in the view of nesting and migrations for many passerine birds.

The territory is of great ecosystem significance as the place of habitat for a large number of species including rare, endangered/vanishing and endemic ones. Moreover, it is of especially high importance due to the continuing degradation of the Big Aral Sea and the Amudarya Delta. This territory is source of subsistence for the most part of the local population (fishery and agriculture, depending on the aquatic environment condition).

By the flora characteristics, the region falls in the Eastern-Aral zone of the Aral-Caspian Province of the Turanium Group. It is characterized by predominance of saline soils and a wide spread occurrence of sands in large and small massifs scattered up and down the lowland. On the clayey soils *Anabasis salsa* communities along with warmwood (*Artemisia pauciflora*, *A. glauca*) alternating with bare takyr soils predominate. The Syrdarya River and its old beds are occupied by Black Saxaul (*Haloxylon aphyllum*), Saltwort (*Salsola* sp.) and Sarsazan (*Halocnemum strobilaceum*).

On the thin sands *Salsola arbuscula* and wormwood (*Artemisia* sps., frequently with *Agropyron* sp.) predominate, while on the thick hilly sands the *Calligonum* sp. and White Saxaul (*Haloxylon persicum*) prevail. Within the Syrdarya delta and its flood-plains the large areas are occupied by peat-land/swamp reed meadows, the remaining part of the Syrdarya flood-plain is occupied by willow-oleaster riparian forests (called "tugay").