

Ecological character

Six types of vegetation communities have been identified for the wetland territory: eremic, pratal, helobious, hylile, dumetosous and immersed.

1. Eremic vegetation is dominated by annual and perennial (suffruticose) saltworts and eremic suffruticose wormwoods. The most widespread plant on the arid solonchak seashore is subshrub (*Halocnemum strobilaceum*), whose communities are tied to very salty seashores and dusty solonchaks. In this community the following animals are common: red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), jerboas (*Alactaga*), great gerbil (*Rhombomys opimu*), little bustard (*Otis tetrax*), gray lark (*Calandrella piscoletta*) and others. Very rarely – saiga antelope (*Saiga tatarica*) and Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata macqueeni*).

2. Pratal vegetation (moory, true, halophytic) – greenlands dominated by moisture-loving grasses, predominantly graminoids. On the seashore plains, *Aeluropus littoralis*, “shortgrowing” annual saltworts and tamarisk greenland communities are widely spread, which are numerous in species composition. Animals in this community type are represented by yellow ground squirrel (*Spermophilus fulvus*), Northern Mole Vole (*Ellobius talpinus*), small mouselike rodents, Yellow-headed Wagtail and Black-headed Wagtail (*Motacilla feldegg*, *M. lutea*)

3. Helobious vegetation – grassy marshes formed on the soils of the swampy type and dominated by reeds, periodically flooded or dry patches of the “water – ground” transitional area. Animals of this community: wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), racoon dog (*Nictereutes procionoides*), musk-rat (*Ondatra zibethica*), Swamp Lynx (*Felis chaus*), golden jackal (*Canis aureus*), Eurasian Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), rails (*Rallidae*), some sandpipers (*Charadriiformes*) and terns (*Chlidonias*).

4. Inundable forests form in fragments on the Ural natural levees, deltoid channels and local groups of slope channels with a prevalence of common willow (*Salix alba*), oleaster (*Elaeagnus oxycarpa*), and sometimes, more scarecely - osier (*Salix caspica*). Typical animals of this society are wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), wolf (*Canis lupus*), red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), racoon dog (*Nictereutes procionoides*); birds – Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*), Red-footed Falcon (*Falco vespertinus*), Hooded Crow (*Corvus cornix*), nesting colonies of Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Great White Egret (*Egretta alba*) and Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*).

5. Dumetosous (tamarisk) thickets grow universally in small patches on the sea plain and in the delta along river beds and arms. Among them ephemeral - tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*, *Eremopyrum triticeum*, *Anisantha tectorum*) and gramineous-tamarisk (*Tamarix ramosissima*, *Vexibia alopecuroides*, *Sphaerophysa salsula*, *Alhagi pseudalhagi*, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*, *Aeluropus littoralis*, *Puccinellia distans*) thickets that grow on inundable pratal solonchak and semi-solonchak soils. Animals inhabiting this type: tamarisk gerbil (*Meriones tamariscinus*), brown hare (*Lepus europaeus*), long-eared hedgehog (*Erenaceus auritus*) and wild boar (*Sus scrofa*).

6. Immersed vegetation of the reservoirs can be divided into communities with dominating immersed rooted aquatics and large seaweeds; aerial - hydric communities with dominating higher plants hygrophytes, including floating (waterlilies, water chestnut

and others) and a layer of immersed plants (hornweed, parrot's-feather and others). Inhabiting animals are great-crested grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), dalmation pelican (*Pelicanus crispus*), greylag goose (*Anser anser*), mute-swan (*Cygnus cygnus*), the Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) and common coot (*Fulica atra*). During molting and migration periods there are congregations of various water fowl species, primarily Anseriformes and *Fulica atra*.