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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Far Eastern Russian Lake Freezes for First February in a Decade

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A view of Kurile Lake

The waters of Kurile Lake on the southern tip of Russia's far eastern Kamchatka Peninsula have frozen over this month for the first time in a decade, prompting scores of large birds to relocate to a nearby sea bay, the local nature reserve said in a statement Monday.

The huge crater lake is home to hundreds of Steller's sea eagles and golden eagles — birds listed as endangered species in Russia — that prey on the lake's salmon, the statement said.

Many of the birds appear to have relocated to Avacha Bay, where residents of the far eastern city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky reported spotting birds with a 2.5-meter wingspan, the nature reserve said.

Despite frigid winters, substantial sections of Kurile Lake usually remain free of ice because of the proximity of the Sea of Okhotsk, hot springs, and frequent strong winds, the statement said. But an unusually cold winter this year caused the lake to freeze over, covering with ice most of the holes where birds gather to feed, the statement said.

“We covered more than 18 kilometers walking on the lake in snowshoes when we patrolled the territory,” an inspector from the Kronotsky nature reserve, Konstantin Lepsky, said in a statement. “We scanned the horizon in all directions from a monitoring tower ... the water basin was completely frozen over.”

Inspectors spotted only one small ice hole at a river estuary, “where ducks and swans were swimming, and Steller's sea eagles were sitting on the ice,” he said.

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