

Kushiro-shitsugen

Low Moor, Freshwater Lake, River

Geographical Coordinates: 43°09'N, 144°26'E / Altitude: 3-10m / Area: 7863ha / Major Type of Wetland: Low moors, freshwater lakes, rivers / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area; Special Protection Zone and Special Zone of National Park / Municipalities Involved: Kushiro City, Kushiro Town, Shibechea Town and Tsurui Village, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: June 1980



Kushiro-shitsugen



Kushiro River (Photo by M. Okada)

Principal Features:

Kushiro-shitsugen, the largest marshland in Japan at 18,000ha, is located approximately 5km north of Kushiro City, in eastern Hokkaido. The area was originally a brackish lagoon closed off from the ocean by a sandspit, whereupon the accumulation of peat commencing 3000 years ago developed into the marshland seen today.

About 80% of the peatland area is dominated by sedge fen (low moor) and reed swamp. The central part of the wetland is scattered with high moors of sphagnum, and intermediate moors of cranberry *Vaccinium oxycoccos*. The Kushiro River and its tributaries run throughout the area. Three large freshwater lakes, Toro-ko, Shirarutoro-ko, and Takkobu-numa are located east of the area.

Six hundred plant, 26 mammalian, and 170 bird species have been observed at Kushiro-shitsugen. Among them are the globally endangered Japanese Crane *Grus japonensis*, Blakiston's Fish-owl *Ke-tupa Blakistoni*, White-tailed Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla*, and Steller's Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus pelagicus*. The area is the only habitat in Japan for the amphibian, the Siberian salamander *Salaman-drella keyserlingii*.

Conservation of the Japanese Crane:

In Japan, Japanese Cranes are found only in eastern Hokkaido. Once threatened with extinction around 1890, some cranes were found in Kushiro-shitsugen in 1924. Locals have been feeding the cranes since 1952 and succeeded in increasing the population to its current 1000.

Wetland-Restoration Activities:

Kushiro-shitsugen once occupied an area of 30,000ha, surrounded by virgin forest. As a result of economic activity in the area including land reclamation for agricultural purposes, marshland area decreased significantly. In some areas of decreasing water levels, low moors once covered with reed and sedge are now gradually being replaced by alder forests. Subsequent to the enactment of the Law for the Promotion of Nature Restoration in 2003, the Kushiro-shitsugen Nature Restoration Committee was established by administrative bodies, the local community, and NGOs to restore the ecosystem of Kushiro-shitsugen.

[Japanese Crane *Grus japonensis*] Large crane species reaching heights of 140cm, and wingspans of 250cm. With a white body and black neck, its tail ap-



Japanese Crane

pears black when the wings are folded. It is the only crane species breeding in Japan. They live in breeding pairs occupying a vast territory. In the Kushiro-shitsugen, the cranes have been fed during winter in areas including Tsurui Village.

Contact Information:

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