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 moor, freshwater lake, river / Designation: Special Protection Area of National Wildlife Protection Area; Special Protection Zone and Special Zone of National Park / Municipalities Involved: Kushiro City, Kushiro Town, Shibecha Town and Tsurui Village, Hokkaido Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: June 1980 / Ramsar Criteria: 1, 2, 3

Kushiro-shitsugen

Kushiro River (Photo by M. Okada)

General Overview:

Kushiro-shitsugen is the largest marshland in Japan with an area of 18,000ha. It is located approximately 5km north of Kushiro City in eastern Hokkaido. The area originally was a part of a sea before it was isolated from the ocean by a sand dune that developed along the coast. The accumulation of peat started 3000 years ago and formed the marshland seen today. The Kushiro River and its tributaries run through the area. Three large fresh water lakes, Toro-ko, Shirarutoro-ko and Takkobu-ko are located in the east.

Approximately 80% of the peatland is a low moor dominated by a reed and sedge community and alder forest. An intermediate and high moor cover the rest of the area. The plant community in the wetland has a variety of species including Marsh Jacob's Ladder, a relict of the ice age.

This wetland is blessed with rich fauna including 26 species of mammals and 170 species of birds. It also is home of the internationally endangered Japanese Crane, White-tailed Sea Eagle, and Steller's Sea Eagle. This is the only habitat in Japan for the unique amphibian Siberian Salamander.

Preservation of Japanese Crane:

In Japan, Japanese Cranes are found mainly in eastern Hokkaido. Once, they were considered to be extinct around 1890, however a small population was found at a corner of Kushiro-shitsugen. After local people started feeding for the cranes in 1952, the population recovered gradually, exceeding 1300 recently.

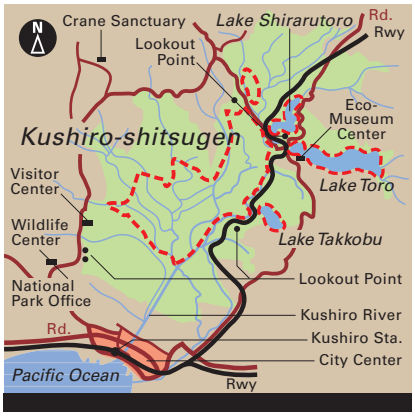
Wetland Restoration Project:

Once, Kushiro-shitsugen was a vast wetland with an area of 30,000ha surrounded by a primeval forest. As a result of economic activities in the area including land reclamation for agriculture, marshland area decreased significantly. On the other hand, as the water level of the wetland declined to induce the drying of the marsh, low moors once covered with reed and sedge have been replaced by alder forests. In response to the enforcement of the Law for the Promotion of Nature Restoration in 2003, Kushiro-shitsugen Nature Restoration Committee was established by administrative bodies, the local community and NGOs and some nature restoration projects are under way in this wetland.

[Japanese Crane *Grus japonensis*]

It is one of the largest cranes with a body length of about 140cm and a wingspan of 250cm. It has a white body and a black neck. The black part on the wing looks almost like a black tail when the wings are folded. It is the only crane species that breeds in Japan. They are monogamous and occupy a large territory. Most of them are protected by winter feeding conducted at places including Tsurui village.

Japanese Crane

Contact Information:

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