

Kushiro-shitsugen

Low Moor, Freshwater Lake, River

Geographical Coordinates: 43°09'N, 144°26'E / Altitude: 3-10m / Area: 7,863ha / 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 / EAAFP Flyway Network Site



Kushiro-shitsugen



Kushiro River (Photo by M. Okada)

General Overview:

Kushiro-shitsugen is the largest marshland in Japan with an area of 22,000ha, of which 7,863ha are designated. It is located approximately 5km north of Kushiro City in eastern Hokkaido. The area was originally part of a sea before it was isolated from the ocean by sand dunes that developed along the coast. Accumulation of peat started 3,000 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 of the marshland.

Approximately 80% of the peatland is a low moor dominated by a reed and sedge community and alder forest. The remainder of the area is covered in intermediate and high moor. The wetland has a variety of plant species, including *Polemonium caeruleum subsp. campanulatum var. paludosum*, a

relict of the ice age.

This wetland is blessed with a richness of fauna, including 39 species of mammals and 200 species of birds. It also is home of the internationally endangered Japanese Crane, White-tailed Sea-eagle, and Steller's Sea-eagle. This is also the only habitat in Japan in which Siberian Salamander, a unique amphibian, can be found.

Preservation of Japanese Crane:

In Japan, Japanese Crane is found mainly in eastern Hokkaido. It was previously believed that the species had gone extinct in around 1890; however, a small population was found in a corner of Kushiro-shitsugen. After local people began feeding the cranes in 1952, the population gradually recovered, and has recently exceeded 1,800.

Wetland Restoration Project:

Once, Kushiro-shitsugen was a vast, 30,000ha wetland surrounded by a primeval forest. However, economic activities in the area including land reclamation for agriculture, caused the marshland area to decrease significantly. Further, as the water level of the wetland declined (as a result of the abovementioned economic activities), drying the marsh, low moors once covered with reed and sedge were 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 several nature restoration projects are currently in progress in this wetland.

[Japanese Crane (*Grus japonensis*)] Japanese Crane is one of the largest cranes with a body length of approximately 140cm and a wingspan of 250cm. It has a white



Japanese Crane

body and a black neck. When the wings are folded, a black part on the wing resembles a black tail. It is the only crane species that breeds in Japan. They are monogamous and occupy a large territory. Most are assisted by winter feeding conducted at places such as Tsurui village.

Contact Information:

Kushiro City Office:
<http://www.city.kushiro.hokkaido.jp/>
Kushiro Town Office:
<http://www.town.kushiro.hokkaido.jp/>
Shibecha Town Office:
<http://www.town.shibecha.hokkaido.jp/yakuba/>
Tsurui Village Office
<http://www.vill.tsurui.lg.jp/>

