

Mammals

Brown Bear

Brown bears are the largest land mammal in Japan, with females weighing up to 300 kg and males weighing as much as 500 kg. Females are approximately 2.5 m in length with the males about 3 m. Indigenous to the Northern Hemisphere, Hokkaido is the world's southernmost brown bear habitat. As omnivores that eat a varied diet, they are able to adapt more easily to Akan's harsh seasonal changes. In the Ainu language, brown bears are called *Kim-un-kamy* which means "god of the mountains." According to the Ainu people, brown bears are disguised deities that have been sent to provide assistance to humans. In the past, bear meat provided the Ainu with food, bear hides were used to make warm clothing, and other body parts were used as medicine.

Yezo Shika Deer

Many of the Akan region's Yezo shika deer migrate north during the summer to Lake Kussharo and the Abashiri region, and the forests of Akan serve as an important wintering spot due to natural warmth from the region's abundant geothermal energy.

In the past, these animals were in danger of becoming extinct. At the beginning of the Meiji Period (1868 –1912), tens of thousands of Yezo shika deer were killed by immigrants who had moved to Hokkaido from Honshu to develop the land. The meat and fur of the deer were exported. Along with this overhunting, in the winter of 1879, the deer experienced a lack of food due to heavy snow. Their numbers plummeted to the point where they were on the verge of becoming an endangered species. As a result, the hunting of Yezo shika deer was banned in 1890. While this ban was lifted in 1957, the deer population rapidly increased beginning around 1980. The deer are now no longer at risk of becoming extinct. Numerous factors have contributed to their recovery, including a decrease in the number of hunters, and better management of the forests. Today, Yezo shika deer can often be seen in towns including Akanko Onsen and on the surrounding national highways. Unfortunately, the larger numbers of deer have damaged forest vegetation and cause more traffic accidents.

Siberian Flying Squirrel

With its tiny body and big, round eyes, the Siberian flying squirrel is one of Hokkaido's most adorable inhabitants. They have a membrane that stretches between their front and rear limbs, allowing them to "fly" distances of 20 m to 30 m. Siberian flying squirrels are nocturnal mammals, and often uses holes made by woodpeckers as shelter during the day. They spend the majority of their waking hours in the treetops. They get their food from the trees around their homes, living on a diet consisting mainly of leaves, buds, seeds, and bark.

Siberian flying squirrels are not able to move well on the ground. Thus, when trees are cut down for development, previously connected sections of forests may become separated, and like an island that suddenly loses its bridge, this results in the squirrels no longer having access to their normal migration paths. If they are not able to breed or move about on their usual paths, this can cause a decrease in population size. Akan Mashu National Park strives to help prevent this from occurring through enforcing development regulations.