

Birds

Black Woodpecker

The black woodpecker is the largest species of woodpecker living in Japan. Its Japanese name is “kumagera.” *Kuma* means “bear” in Japanese, referring to the black woodpecker’s large size. According to Ainu legend, the birds warn others when a bear is nearby. Black woodpeckers are said to be able to guide people who have lost their way.

The calls of the black woodpecker can be heard all around Lake Akan. Although a rare experience elsewhere in Japan, the large numbers of black woodpeckers here means that visitors have a very good chance of spotting one. The woodpeckers use their beaks to make holes in both large living trees and decayed trees, and eat insect larvae found in the trunk. The hammering sound they make can be heard throughout the forest. The territory of one pair span approximately 200 hectares, and they stay within this area even during the harsh cold of winter. A breeding pair will take turns incubating their eggs and will share the duty of feeding their chicks.

Black woodpeckers grow to about 50 cm in length with a wingspan close to 70 cm. They are distinguishable by their jet-black body and bright red head. A rare bird in Japan, they were designated a Natural Monument in 1965.

White-tailed Eagle

Adult white-tailed eagles grow to 70 to 100 cm in length with a wingspan of 180 to 240 cm. They are a migratory bird that comes to Hokkaido from northern Eurasia for the winter. White-tailed eagles are a type of sea eagle, and as such, they commonly live in coastal areas. However, in rare cases, some white-tailed eagles make their way further inland to Lake Akan. The birds build their nests on the tops of large trees along the lakeshore and in the surrounding forests. They fly low across the surface of the water to catch fish and dive down to catch small mammals on land. The white-tailed eagles around Lake Akan are known to eat large fish such as white-spotted char.

White-tailed eagles and their habitat have faced various threats. Deforestation in Hokkaido decreased the number of nests and roosting grounds. Also, some white-tailed eagles died from poisoning after consuming Yezo shika deer that were shot and killed with lead bullet. In order to protect the eagles, the shooting of Yezo shika deer with lead bullets is now banned in Hokkaido. White-tailed eagles were designated a Natural Monument in 1970 and are currently classified by the Ministry of the Environment as a “Red List” endangered species.