

Animals of the Marshland

Kushiro Marsh is inhabited by more than 200 species of birds and animals, including red-crowned cranes, Ezo red foxes, Ezo true squirrels, Blakiston's fish owls, and white-tailed eagles. Elusive by nature, these animals remain largely hidden from humans. The best observation opportunities are along riverbanks when the animals go to drink or in groves and grasslands when they are in search of food. Their presence is most visible in the tracks that they leave. Footprints are often found in the damp soil around pools of water, on soft areas of earth, and on snow during the winter. Feces and pellets of undigested food regurgitated by birds tell of the wildlife that live in the area. The marshland is visited by both summer and winter migrant birds, which means that a wide variety of different birds can be seen and heard depending on the season. Unique creatures, such as the Siberian salamander, live below the surface; in Japan, this endangered species is found only within Kushiro Marsh. The waterways are home to Sakhalin taimen, Japan's largest freshwater fish, as well as native Japanese crayfish.

Introduced Species of the Marsh

As well as native wildlife, Kushiro Marsh is populated with species introduced from foreign countries. The marshlands have become home to minks that escaped from farms for fur production; signal crayfish that were brought as feed for fish from America; buff-tailed bumblebees that were introduced to pollinate crops; and golden glows that were planted simply for their pretty flowers. After their introduction, these plants and animals gradually increased in numbers and began to have a negative impact on the native wildlife and ecosystems of the marshlands. Some started to destroy the habitats of native species, for example signal crayfish that damaged aquatic plants. In other cases, the introduced animals were a direct danger to native species, such as minks preying on the chicks of red-crowned cranes. Consequently, the Invasive Alien Species Act was enacted in 2005 to prevent further adverse effects caused by introduced plants and animals. It is now prohibited to breed, cultivate, or store invasive alien species, as well as to transport, import, or release them.