

## Kushiro Marsh, a Ramsar Site

The Ramsar Convention is an international treaty for the conservation of important wetlands that serve as waterfowl habitats. The Convention was enacted in the Iranian city of Ramsar in 1971, and there are now more than 2,300 Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Sites) worldwide. Since they provide freshwater, food, and building materials, wetlands are crucial for the survival of humans, plants, and wildlife. As such, through international cooperation, the Ramsar Convention aims to maintain and protect the function, resources, and value of wetlands for coming generations.

Japan joined the convention in 1980 with Kushiro Shitsugen (Marsh) as its first designated site. At first the protected sanctuary area was limited to 5,012 hectares, but this was expanded to 7,726 ha in July 1989, and finally to 7,863 ha in January 1999. To become a Ramsar Site, a wetland must meet at least one of nine criteria; for example, it must support a community of endangered species, or provide a food source for fish, spawning grounds, and a habitat for juvenile fish.

In becoming a Ramsar Site, Kushiro Marsh was noted for its pristine state and its rare plants and animals. Human development has had only a minor impact on the marsh, and much of the area is preserved in its original state. It is an important habitat for numerous creatures, including red-crowned cranes, an endangered bird found only in Hokkaido, far eastern Russia, China, and Korea, and many other rare bird species. It provides vital habitat for Sakhalin taimen, a freshwater salmon, and the Siberian salamander. The majority of Kushiro Marsh is low moorland covered in sedges and reeds, with scattered forests of Japanese alder trees. Since 2003, the local community has joined together to undertake regeneration projects in order to protect further this important region.