

## Kushiro Shitsugen National Park

Kushiro Shitsugen (Marsh) became Japan's 28th national park in July 1987. The park's boundaries enclose a total area of 28,788 ha. Within its borders are expansive bogs of reeds and sedges, meandering rivers, lagoons, as well as the surrounding hills. The national park is Japan's largest wetland. This vast plateau was once underwater as a part of Old Kushiro Bay. When the sea retreated, sand built up at the mouth of the bay, and the area was eventually cut off from the sea, becoming a brine lake. Over the past 3,000 years this brine has turned to fresh water, and peat has accumulated atop the mud and sand, creating the environment that exists today. The wetland is home to many rare species, including red-crowned cranes, Blakiston's fish owls, Sakhalin taimen, and Siberian salamanders. Many of these animals can be spotted from the walkways and observatories located around the marshland. While exploring the park, it is also possible to see many species of plants such as cuckoo flowers in spring, Japanese irises in summer, and water peppers in autumn. In winter, a small amount of snow accumulates on the plateau, creating yet another unique and beautiful landscape.