

## **Hosooka Observatory**

The view from this lookout is of Japan's largest wetland, Kushiro Shitsugen, which covers about 29,000 hectares. The Kushiro River meanders across the wetland, flanked by reeds (*Phragmites*) and sedges (*Carex*). It is the natural habitat of the red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*), thought to be extinct in Japan until they were discovered here in 1924. The birds are occasionally visible from this observatory.

This area was once submerged beneath the sea. When the seawater retreated about 4,000 years ago, a peaty wetland gradually arose. Three nearby lakes, Toro, Shirarutoro, and Takkobu were formed at this time. The hilly terrain in the middle distance includes Cape Miyajima and Cape Kirakotan, their names a reminder of their coastal past.

The mountains on the horizon are the Akan range. Mt. Meakan, meaning "female Akan," is the tallest and an active volcano. To the right is a dormant volcano, Mt. Oakan, meaning "male Akan."

In 1980, Kushiro Shitsugen became the first site in Japan to be protected by the Ramsar Convention, an international treaty that provides the framework for conservation of wetland areas. It became a National Park seven years later.