

## **Sakhalin Taimen**

The Sakhalin taimen (*Hucho perryi*, called *ito* in Japanese) is the largest species of freshwater fish in Japan. It once inhabited the northern part of the Tohoku region (northern Honshu), but the population is in decline, and the species is now found domestically only in Hokkaido.

### *A valuable resource*

The Ainu, the indigenous people of Hokkaido, hunted the Sakhalin taimen for food and used its tough skin to make footwear. Over the past 40 years, the population of these fish has dwindled due to overfishing and loss of habitat, and the species is considered critically endangered.

### *Long-lived fish*

The Sakhalin taimen can live up to 20 years. Unlike most salmon species, which spawn just once before dying, the Sakhalin taimen will spawn several times over the course of its life. The adults are usually a subdued brown color with a fine pattern of spots, but during the spawning season the males take on a reddish hue.

While mature Sakhalin taimens generally reach around 1 meter in length, the largest known example, caught in Hokkaido, was recorded at 2.1 meters. These fish are at the top of the food chain in the Kushiro Wetlands. Young Sakhalin taimens feed mostly on aquatic insects, while adults eat larger animals found around the water, including other fish, frogs, mice, and snakes.