

## Plants and Animals

The diverse landforms of Tokachi Shikaoi Geopark support a wide range of habitats and species. The vast Tokachi Plain with its tillable, ash-rich soil has long allowed agriculture to flourish. The Shikaribetsu mountains north of Shikaoi have rich ecosystems and micro-ecosystems with diverse moss and lichen species as well as uniquely evolved and relict animal species.

### *The plains*

The Tokachi Plain is one of the largest farming areas in Hokkaido, supplying crops and dairy products across much of the country. Beans, potatoes, wheat, and sugar beets are grown in rotation across the plains, and each accounts for a significant share of the domestic yield. Dairy cattle graze in pastures and Ezo deer roam freely in the flatlands around Shikaoi. Ezo red foxes and brown bears also inhabit the plains. The brown bear is not found anywhere else in Japan outside of Hokkaido.

### *The mountains*

The peaks of the Shikaribetsu volcanic group reach altitudes of around 1,300 meters and encircle Lake Shikaribetsu, the highest-altitude lake in Hokkaido at 804 meters. The mountains and lake are home to many bird species, waterfowl, salmonid species, and cold-climate animal species such as the Ezo *nakiusagi*, a subspecies of the northern pika. White-tailed eagles soar above the lake year-round, and Steller's sea eagles migrate to the area in winter. Ospreys hunt above the lake in the warmer months, and black woodpeckers make their nests in tree trunks in the run-up to spring. The Miyabe char is a uniquely evolved subspecies of char and is not found anywhere else in the world. Other subspecies endemic to Hokkaido and found in the park's mountains include the nocturnal Ezo flying squirrel and the brown bear.

Dense evergreen forests grow around the lake and below the tree line. They are made up of cold-resistant species such as Sakhalin spruce, Yezo spruce, and Sakhalin fir. Alpine plants, such as varieties of Labrador tea with white flowers and Hakusan rhododendrons with pale pink flowers, grow on the mountainsides and forest floors. The windholes on the rocky slopes of the Shikaribetsu lava domes have their own micro-ecosystems, which support diverse colonies of moss and lichen.