

Views of Rishiri-Rebun-Sarobetsu National Park

# Sarobetsu —the Northernmost Plain

The view of Sarobetsu Plain from above

## One of the Most Valuable Large Wetlands Remaining in Japan

Sarobetsu Wetland formerly stretched 27km north to south, and 8km east to west, its area reaching 14,600ha, ranking third after Ishikari Peatland and Kushiro Wetland in terms of total area in Hokkaido. However, development in the wetland has progressed since the mid-1960s, and the area has now been reduced to about 6,700ha. However, it is one of the few representative wetlands remaining in Japan, along with Kushiro Wetland and Ozegahara of Oze National Park, and is Japan's largest high moor located at lowlands.



Extensive Sarobetsu Plain

## Organisms of the Wetland

Animals such as the Ezo Deer (*Cervus yezoensis*) and the Eurasian Least Shrew (*Sorex minutissimus hawkeri*), as well as numerous bird species, including the Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), the African Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*), and the Long-tailed Rosefinch (*Uragus sibiricus*) inhabit Sarobetsu Plain and the entire zone of sand dune thickets along the coast. The Japanese Crane (*Grus japonensis*), formerly only inhabiting eastern Hokkaido, has been nesting in Sarobetsu since 2004. Also, rare raptor species can be seen, including the White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*) and the Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) as well as reptiles such as the Common Lizard (*Zootoca vivipara*), which are distributed only in northern Hokkaido.



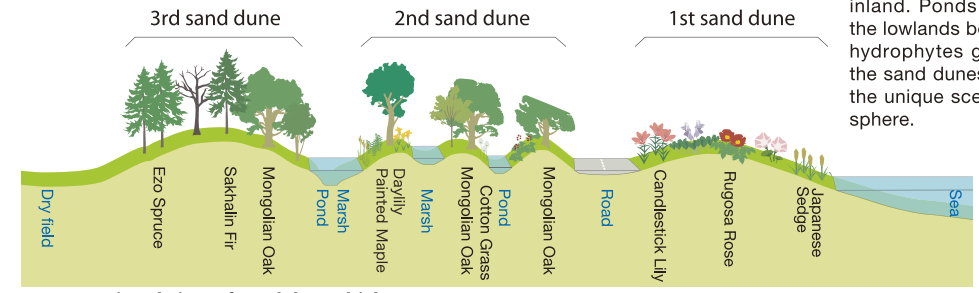
1



2



Sand dune thickets



Cross-sectional view of sand dune thickets

## Coastal Ecosystem Preserved

A few sets of sand dunes run parallel to the shoreline on the coast of Sarobetsu. Many parts of the coast remain natural and vegetation linking the ocean and the land are intact. Beach plants such as the Rugosa Rose (*Rosa rugosa*) and American Dunegrass (*Elymus mollis*) grow on the coast. Short thickets of Mongolian Oak (*Quercus mongolica*) are present in the sand dunes facing the coast, with branches facing landward due to strong winds and with uniform heights as if they had been pruned. There are thickets of the Sakhalin Fir (*Abies sachalinensis*) with a mix of the Painted Maple (*Acer mono var. glabrum*) on the interior sand dunes and the height of the trees increases as you go further inland. Ponds and wetlands are present in the lowlands between the sand dunes, where hydrophytes grow. Overall, the thickets on the sand dunes are virtually undisturbed and the unique scenery is rich in primeval atmosphere.

## Column

### The History of Wetland Development and Efforts to Restore Nature

Sarobetsu Wetland with its cold climate, had been thought to be unsuitable for agricultural use. Peat was mined at one section during the reclamation of Hokkaido from the late 19th century to the early 20th century, but the development of agricultural land was limited mostly to the dry hills surrounding the wetland.

Settlement by repatriates took place after the Second World War, and large-scale integrated development projects were carried out in the 1960s, including the Sarobetsu drainage ditch. At this time, the value of the wetland, which had been considered useless till then, was reconsidered and the opportunity for conservation increased. Subsequently the principal section of the wetland was incorporated into the national park in 1974. Due to development projects so far, effects have been seen such as the dehydration of the wetland through the excavation of drainage channels, invasion of bamboo grass, and environmental changes caused by the influx of sand into lakes. For this reason, efforts to restore nature have begun, aiming to regenerate wetland where traces of peat mining remain, and to prevent the lowering of the water level in the wetland.



Banks to prevent the lowering of the wetland water level



The remains of peat mining site seen from above