

SHIRETOKO NATIONAL PARK

Shiretoko National Park covers most of the Shiretoko Peninsula at the northeastern tip of the island of Hokkaidō, Japan. The word "Shiretoko" is derived from an Ainu word "sir etok", meaning "the place where the earth protrudes".

One of the most remote regions in Japan, much of the peninsula is only accessible on foot or by boat. Shiretoko is best known as the home of Japan's largest population of brown bears, and for offering views of Kunashiri



Island, ownership of which Japan and Russia dispute. Shiretoko is also the home of many birds, such as Steller's sea eagle and white-tailed eagle, and marine animals such as spotted seal, orca whale, and sperm whale.[1] The park has a hot springs waterfall called Kamuiwakka Falls (カムイワッカの滝 Kamuiwakka-no-taki). Kamui wakka means "water of the gods" in Ainu.

The forests of the park are temperate and subalpine mixed forests; the main tree species include Sakhalin fir (*Abies sachalinensis*), Erman's birch (*Betula ermanii*) and Mongolian oak (*Quercus mongolica*). Beyond the forest limit there are impenetrable Siberian dwarf pine (*Pinus pumila*) thickets.

In 2005, UNESCO designated the area a World Heritage Site, advising to develop the property jointly with the Kuril Islands of Russia as a transboundary "World Heritage Peace Park". Shiretoko's listing as Natural Heritage was seen by the Indigenous Ainu as contradicting the long history of Ainu settlement in the park area.

The Shiretoko Park Nature Center is in Shari. It serves as the visitor center and includes a movie about the park, a restaurant, and a gift shop.

HISTORY

Shiretoko National Park was established in 1964.

In 2005, UNESCO named the area a World Heritage Site.[1] UNESCO also suggested that Japan should work with Russia to make an international "World Heritage Peace

Park" including the Kuril Islands. Both Japan and Russia claim these islands as part of their countries.

GEOGRAPHY

Shiretoko is hard to get to. Visitors must go to most places on foot or by boat. There is a hot springs waterfall called Kamuiwakka Falls (カムイワッカの滝 Kamuiwakka-no-taki). Kamui wakka means "water of the gods" in Ainu.

➤ Plants

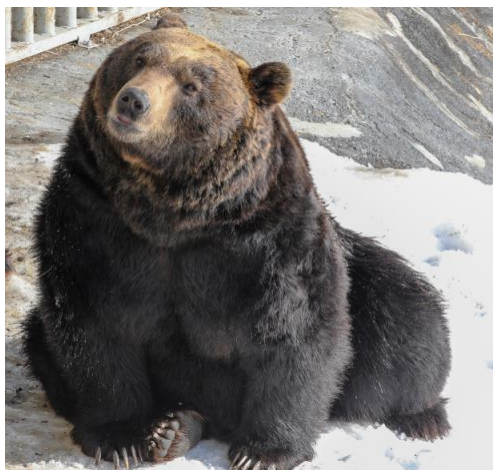
The park forests are temperate and subalpine. There are several different types of trees. The most common trees here are Sakhalin fir, Erman's birch, and Mongolian oak.

➤ Animals

The park has Japan's largest mammal species of Ezo brown bears.



FLORA AND FAUNA



The Shiretoko Peninsula is home to many species of both conifers and broadleaf trees, including the acorn-bearing *Quercus mongolica* (mizunara). Siberian dwarf pine trees grow above 1,000 metres (3,000 ft). Red foxes and sika deer also inhabit the area. There are a large number of Ussuri brown bears. The upper reaches of Mount Rausu, Mount Onnebetsu, and Mount Shari are the only known breeding areas of Arctic warblers in Hokkaido. Sea eagles flourish here, and seals can be often seen on the coast. The last confirmed record of Japanese otter in Hokkaido

was from Shari River.

Whale watching is a popular attraction for tourists. Thirteen or fourteen species of cetaceans have been recorded in the area. Especially for orcas, or killer whales, the waters surrounding the peninsula are regarded as one of the most significant habitat areas in the northwestern Pacific.[citation needed] There was a notable mass stranding of

twelve animals in February 2005. Nine animals died. In 2019, two white individuals have been sighted. In 2019 and 2021, several white individuals were seen.

Shiretoko Peninsula is one of the few places where groups of male sperm whales and beaked whales including Baird's beaked whales can be spotted from the shore. Other frequently seen species include minke whales, Pacific white-sided dolphins, Dall's porpoises, and harbour porpoises. Newly described Sato's beaked whale inhabits the area as well. °

Endangered populations of humpback whales and fin whales in the Sea of Okhotsk have started to recover in recent years. Some beluga whales, or white whales, that are thought to be vagrants from the endangered population in the northern Sea of Okhotsk do occur, specifically a sub-adult individual that continuously appeared at the town of Shibetsu for several years in the 2000s. North Pacific right whales, the most endangered of all the great whales, have been observed close to the shore mainly on the Sea of Okhotsk side of the peninsula for several times including in 2013, 2018, and 2019 with several sightings noted in 2013 and 2019, and 2018 sighting and one of 2019 sighting have been made by the same tour operator, Doutou Kanko Kaihatsu (Corporation) From June 21 to 23, 2015, the first ever sighting of a bowhead whale in the Japanese EEZ occurred (the first record of the species in the nation was of a catch record in Osaka Bay on June 23, 1969). Several records from whaling days show blue whales to have been harpooned and landed at Abashiri port, though this species normally does not enter adjacent seas and are now thought to be almost extinct in Japan's waters. As deep, productive water, some species of beaked whales favor the area including Cuvier's beaked whales, Stejneger's beaked whales, and others. Baird's beaked whales, the largest of this group, are most frequently observed close to shore. An unidentified form or subspecies of beaked whale is known to inhabit the waters off Shiretoko Peninsula and Abashiri. Long-finned pilot whales which once inhabited the waters around Hokkaido are thought to have become extinct in the 12th century, but unconfirmed sightings of short-finned pilot whales have been reported in Nemuro Strait though the area is out of their normal range.

There is notable flora diversity including endemic *Cymatoceras japonica*, endangered species such as *Viola kitamiana* (Japanese) which Japanese name was named after Shiretoko Peninsula, *Dendranthema arcticum*, *Astragalus japonicus*.

