
Blakiston's Fish Owl

The Blakiston's fish owl (*shimafukuro*) is the world's largest owl and a critically endangered species. The bird's nesting sites have dwindled worldwide due to deforestation; however, Shiretoko's strict conservation measures provide a safe habitat in the peninsula's forests. It roosts in the hollows of large trees and fishes for prey in shallow rivers. Visitors to Rausu may be able to view these birds after dusk when they leave their nesting sites to hunt.

Viewing the Blakiston's fish owl

As with all wild animal encounters, it is impossible to guarantee owl sightings. However, years of monitoring have revealed their behavioral patterns. They rarely travel far from their roosts and regularly return to the same hunting grounds. They are generally active after dusk, although this depends on the time of year. In November, they tend to appear around sunset. However, in February and March—during breeding season—they tend to appear much later, around 1 a.m. There are several viewing points around the Shiretoko Peninsula. Staff at the Shiretoko Rausu Michi no Eki tourist information counter can recommend a location.

The Blakiston's line: a boundary of species

The owl gets its name from the Blakiston's Line, a zoogeographical boundary between Hokkaido and Japan's largest island, Honshu. Animals above this line are related to species in northern Asia, which tend to be larger. Species below the line share similarities with those of southern Asia and tend to be smaller. The line was named after British explorer and naturalist Thomas Blakiston (1832–1891,) who first made this observation.