**Nasu in Winter**

Among the trunks of bare trees, the dense green-and-white leaves of kumabamboo grass peek through the snow. Cold seasonal winds called the Nasu Oroshi blow in from the northwest, and average January temperatures are below freezing. Snow accumulation averages between 20 and 30 centimeters.

During the winter, black bears, dormice, badgers, raccoon dogs (*tanuki*), and other animals are in hibernation. The tracks of still-active mammals such as Japanese serow, foxes, and Japanese martens crisscross the snowy landscape of the lowlands. The serow—resembling a shaggy antelope but actually a member of the bovine family—lives primarily in mountainous areas. It was once hunted nearly to extinction, but a protection law passed in 1955 has allowed populations to recover. Japanese martens, which are related to weasels, are dusky brown during the warmer months, but in winter transform into a vivid yellow for camouflage. In recent years, wild boar have been sighted in the forest. This encroaching species disturbs the ground while digging for insects, and in the process damages the roots of more delicate plant species.

In February, forests echo with the hammering of woodpeckers as they stake their claims to territories and seek out mates. Four species of woodpeckers—the Japanese pygmy woodpecker, great spotted woodpecker, Japanese green woodpecker, and white-backed woodpecker—inhabit the region year-round. Abandoned woodpecker nest holes become home to small creatures like the dormouse.

Camellias bloom in the urban areas of Nasu from mid-February until mid-March, when the snow melts and the purple blooms of Asian fawnlilies signal the coming of spring.