

Butterflies of Aso

Kumamoto Prefecture is said to have the largest number of butterfly species in the whole of Kyushu. Out of the 117 species found in Kumamoto, 109 can be found in Aso.

The abundance of wildflowers in Aso's grasslands brings color to the landscape, attracting a variety of butterflies to the area. The 600 species of plants and flowers in the grasslands have adapted to the specific environment and cool climate, creating a unique biodiversity hotspot. This biodiversity plays a vital role in supporting the ecosystem, particularly for the butterfly larvae which feed on Aso's plants.

Some of the plants of Aso are known as “food plants” and support many butterfly species, including the Aso blue butterfly (*Shijimiaeoides divinus*), which eats only a type of plant called *kurara* (*Sophora flavescens*, shrubby sophora). As *kurara* grow in temperate grasslands, controlled burnings, which thin out competitive plants, and grazing, in which cattle eat low-growing plants but avoid *kurara*, provide them with an ideal habitat. Aso is now the only place in Kyushu in which this species of butterfly survives. The ecosystem that has formed as a result of this method of management is unique to Aso and hosts a number of other butterfly species that live only in the fields and grasslands of Aso, including the green-banded swallowtail butterfly (*Graphium sarpedon nipponum*), the pale blue tiger butterfly (*Parantica sita nipponica*), and the small copper butterfly (*Lycaena phlaeas daimio*).