

### **Byakko-ike Pond**

Byakko-ike and the other ponds in the shrine gardens are fed by water from the Lake Biwa Canal, which flows from Lake Biwa, 10 kilometers east, in Shiga Prefecture. The canal was one of the largest civil engineering projects of the late nineteenth century, begun in 1885. Its first phase was completed in 1890, five years before Heian Jingu was built.

Byakko-ike and the other ponds are home to a wide variety of plants and animals. Among them are fish and freshwater clams from Lake Biwa. The striped bitterling (*Acheilognathus cyanostigma*) in the ponds is an endangered, endemic species of ray-finned fish with a single stripe across its body.

There are nearly 200 varieties of irises planted around the edges of Byakko-ike, and several water lily species flourish in its waters, including the East Asian yellow water-lily (*Nuphar japonica*), native to Japan and Korea. It has a smaller, rounder flower than more common water lily species. The irises and water lilies at Byakko-ike bloom in June.

The pond shares its name with the tower beside the entrance to the shrine gardens, Byakkoro Tower. Both are named after the White Tiger of the West, one of the celestial guardians in ancient Chinese astronomy.