

【Okushiga Shirakaba Enro Course】

The Okushiga Shirakaba Enro Course is an easy walking trail that begins and ends at the Okushiga Pension Mura, a cluster of lodges near the Okushiga Kōgen ski area. The 3.7-kilometer trail has an elevation change of about 50 meters and takes approximately 80 minutes to complete.

The course offers a peaceful stroll through groves of white birch (*Betula platyphylla*) and Japanese beech trees (*Fagus crenata*), the latter of which is rare in other parts of the Shiga Highlands. The path leads to Shirakaba Pond, which attracts large numbers of dragonflies, damselflies, and butterflies. The quiet woods and abundant insects create a magical atmosphere that lures photographers to the area in autumn, when the birch and beech leaves turn golden yellow.

Japanese beech trees are home to a variety of bird life. On this trail, hikers can often hear the sounds of great spotted woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos major*), Japanese green woodpeckers (*Picus awokera*), and pygmy woodpeckers (*Dendrocopos kizuki*) knocking on the trunks as they hunt for insects, indicate their territory, and search for dead wood in which to nest. You may also hear the faint hoot of the Japanese scops owl (*Otus scops japonicus*). Its call is said to resemble “buppōsō,” the word for the Three Jewels of Buddhism—Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.