

Mt. Sasayama and the *Akebono* Azalea

The akebono azalea on Mt. Sasayama

The 1,065-meter Mt. Sasayama is most renowned for its *akebono* azaleas, which are particularly prominent near the summit and add a splash of vivid pink to the mountainside at the height of spring.

The species mainly grows on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's main islands, and Mt. Sasayama is its only habitat on Shikoku. The *akebono* azalea has been designated a near-threatened species by the Ministry of the Environment.

Protecting the akebono azalea

A severe threat to the *akebono* azaleas of Mt. Sasayama was recognized in the early 1990s, when the amount of dwarf bamboo (*sasa*) growing on the mountain's slopes was found to be decreasing. This was due to deer eating the bamboo at an unsustainable rate, leaving the nutritious soil that sustains the azaleas bare and susceptible to being washed away by rains. Local people banded together to protect the azalea in various ways.

[Captions]

Dwarf bamboo growing on Mt. Sasayama, and the same place after a deer visit.

Building and maintenance of 2.2 kilometers of fence to keep deer away (the fences are repaired twice a year).

Growing saplings and monitoring the growth of young trees.