

Mt. Karakunidake: Flora and Fauna

The lower slopes of Mt. Karakunidake are heavily forested with red pine. The trees are smaller and less upright than those on the Ebino Kogen Highlands as a result of their greater proximity to volcanic activity. As the elevation rises, they gradually give way to deciduous trees such as beeches and oaks. In spring, the delicate yellow flowers of winter hazel (*Corylopsis glabrescens*) fill the forest. Bush warblers and tits chirp among the trees, while green woodpeckers hammer the trunks to mark their territory. In summer, cuckoos call through the foliage.

Four Seasons at the Peak

Above the third station (about 1,400 meters), the tree cover thins out, replaced by great clusters of Miyama-Kirishima azaleas (*Rhododendron kiusianum*), dwarf bamboo (*Sasa nipponica*), and other tenacious flora. In spring, these come into bloom with subtle colors like the reddish pink of the azaleas and the purplish blue of the gentians. Summer flowers include white panicle hydrangea; pale blooms of the *koba-no-kurozuru* (*Tripterygium doianum*), a plant in the bittersweet family; and the purple *kirishima-higotai* (*Saussurea scaposa* Franch. & Sav.), a kind of snow lotus. Dark-red *niga-ichigo* (*Rubus microphyllus* L.f.) and balloon berries add accents here and there. In autumn, silver grass covers the Ebino Kogen Highlands far below, as do deciduous trees turning crimson. In winter, the landscape is transformed by snowfall, providing the rare opportunity to see hoarfrost-covered trees.

There are few mammals or birds higher up the mountain, but many insects, including the jumbo dragonfly and chestnut tiger butterfly. In summer, the summit in particular buzzes with dragonflies that come to eat smaller insects swept up by air currents.