

Mt. Ebinodake: Flora and Fauna

Mt. Ebinodake is a border zone between temperate and warm-temperate forests. Conifers and evergreen broadleaf trees cover the lower slopes, with deciduous trees at the higher elevations. The spaces between the trees are eerily empty—the deer, more numerous than before, devour the underbrush, leaving only poisonous or unpalatable plants like Japanese star anise and sapphireberry. This is a relatively new development in the ecosystem, dating to the 1980s and resulting from a number of factors including changes in human economic activity and climate change. It remains to be seen if equilibrium can be reached.

Boars, martens, and field mice also roam the area, and cuckoos call in summer. Heavy rainfall and abundant shade make the area rich in mushrooms and other fungi.

The Ebino Kogen Highlands also support a plant that grows only in sunny spots along the area's rivers: *Malus spontanea*, known in Japanese as *nokaido*, or “field crabapple.” The *nokaido* has delicate pink-tinged flowers and tiny fruit. It has been designated a National Natural Monument, and active preservation efforts are underway to save it from extinction.