

## **Mt. Ebinodake: Flora and Fauna**

Deer have made their mark on Mt. Ebinodake. Since the 1980s, their numbers have increased due to a range of factors, including changes in human activity and climate change. Today, deer eat so much of the underbrush that the forest is eerily empty between the trees. Only unpleasant-tasting or poisonous plants like Japanese star anise (*Illicium anisatum*) and sapphireberry (*Symplocos myrtacea*) survive. This is a relatively recent phenomenon, visible on many other mountains in Japan, and it remains to be seen how the ecosystem will adjust.

Boars, martens, and field mice also inhabit the area, although they leave fewer signs of their presence. In the early summer, cuckoos can be heard calling, and jays are present year-round. Visitors may occasionally catch sight of a white-rumped copper pheasant picking its way through the trees.

## **Conifers, Evergreens, and Mushrooms**

Mt. Ebinodake is a border zone between temperate and warm-temperate forests. The lower parts of the hiking trail pass through conifers and evergreen broadleaf trees that thrive in a warm climate, but at higher elevations these give way to trees adapted to colder, rainy climates, such as beeches. The towering white beeches are a barometer for a forest's health. They have evolved to make efficient use of rainwater, and even redistribute it. The deciduous trees along the trail transition from brilliant green new growth in the spring to crimson foliage in autumn, then gleam with hoarfrost in winter.

Heavy rainfall and plentiful shade also make Mt. Ebinodake an excellent place to find mushrooms and various other fungi, from coral fungus to glow-in-the-dark *tsukiyotake* (*Omphalotus japonicus*).

## **The “Field Crabapple”**

The Ebino Kogen Highlands are home to a distinctive native plant: *Malus spontanea*, known in Japanese as *nokaido*, or “field crabapple.” The *nokaido* has red and pink blossoms in spring and grows only in sunny areas along Kirishima's rivers. It has been designated a National Natural Monument, and active efforts are underway to preserve it.