

Plants, Animals, and Birds of Daisetsuzan National Park

A vast array of rare and endemic species flourishes in the soaring mountains and dense forests of Daisetsuzan National Park. Many of the some-250 species of alpine plants in the area are native to the region. In the warmer months, delicate alpine flowers bloom on the mountainsides and attract native butterfly species. The dense forests that cover the park's foothills are home to elusive creatures like the Blakiston's fish owl and the northern pika, a small mammal with round ears and a shrill whistling cry.

Plants and butterflies

The foothills of Daisetsuzan are blanketed with trees such as the Yezo spruce and Erman's birch. Because of the extremely cold climate, the tree line in Daisetsuzan is the lowest in Japan. In spring and summer, alpine flowers bloom above the tree line, adding color to the mountainsides.

Around July visitors can spot flora such as the yellow azalea, which turns pink after it is pollinated, and colonies of white-petaled Aleutian avens (*Geum pentapetalum*). In mid-July clusters of pink *komakusa* (*Dicentra peregrina*) thrive in patches of gravel, and *hosoba uruppuso* (*Lagotis yessoensis*) blooms with clusters of light-purple flowers. The blue Ezo *oyamarindo* (*Gentiana triflora* var. *japonica*), which signals the end of summer, blooms around Sugatami Pond on Mt. Asahidake's western slope.

Flower meadows on mountainsides throughout the park are frequented by rare alpine butterflies such as the translucent yellow-winged Eversmann's parnassian and the intricately patterned Freija fritillary. These species are found nowhere else in Japan.

Animals

Small mammals such as the Siberian flying squirrel, Ezo stoat, and mountain hare populate Daisetsuzan's forests and mountainsides. On cool, rocky slopes, visitors can sometimes hear the shrill, bird-like cry of the northern pika, a small, round-eared mammal of the rabbit family that is a survivor of the Ice Age.

Daisetsuzan has a high population of Ussuri brown bears, the largest land animal in Japan. Active from spring to autumn, they wander from the foothills to higher elevations between August and September to feed on the bog bilberry (*Sorbus matsumura*). The Brown Bear Information Center at Kogen Onsen hot springs provides visitors the opportunity to learn about the Ussuri brown bear. Visitors may hike a loop trail through a series of marshes from the Center, provided they take part in a bear

safety lecture beforehand. Guided walks, which can be booked with English-speaking guides, offer the possibility of spotting a bear in the wild from a safe distance.

Birds

Daisetsuzan is inhabited by the Blakiston's fish owl, one of the rarest owls in the world, as well as the largest. This elusive nocturnal creature hunts river fish. It is revered as a deity by the Ainu, the Indigenous people who have lived in Hokkaido for thousands of years. Other reclusive forest-dwellers include the yellow-crowned Eurasian three-toed woodpecker, the hazel grouse, and the tiny boreal owl.

Birds like the pine grosbeak, the spotted nutcracker, and the Japanese accentor are relatively easy to spot near groves of dwarf pine above the tree line. The male pine grosbeak is identified by its bright-red plumage, while the spotted nutcracker is distinguished by its dark-brown feathers speckled with white dots. The Siberian rubythroat can be seen near alpine flower meadows in the summer; males have a crimson patch on their throats.