

Forest Life

The Tsuta Forest teems with a variety of plant and animal life throughout the year. The following are a few examples of the many species of flora and fauna that populate the area (names are listed in English first, followed by Japanese and scientific names).

Birds

Narcissus flycatcher (*kibitaki*; *Ficedula narcissina*)

This flycatcher migrates from Southeast Asia to mate in the spring and early summer. It makes its nest in the upper reaches of hollow trees and in old woodpecker nests. The male is bright yellow from throat to chest, with a black crown. Narcissus flycatchers are relatively easy to spot because of their repeated behavior of flying from the tip of a branch to pick an insect out of the air, then flying back to the same perch. Breeding males have a particularly melodious song.

Eastern crowned warbler (*Sendai mushikui*; *Phylloscopus coronatus*)

A migrating bird that comes from as far as India, this warbler favors deciduous broadleaf forests in the lower reaches of the mountains. It is small, with a length of 12.5 centimeters, and has a dark-green back and a grayish-white front. It feeds on insects, and though quite difficult to spot, can be located through its loud song.

Eurasian jay (*kakesu*; *Garrulus glandarius*)

With blue striped patches on its wings and black patches around the eyes, this jay stands out in the forest. It feeds on insects and the eggs and chicks of other birds, but turns to acorns (which it stores under dead leaves on the ground) as autumn comes. It is particularly vocal in the spring and fall, and is known to be capable of mimicking many other birds, including birds of prey—and, some say, even cats and humans.

Mandarin duck (*oshidori*; *Aix galericulata*)

Mandarin ducks are fond of forested areas near fresh water, so the swamps of Tsuta are an ideal habitat for them. These waterfowl can be seen in many places, notably the Tsutanuma, Naganuma, Sugenuma, and Hyotannuma swamps. The ducks mate and breed in the forest, building their nests in hollow tree trunks. The vibrant colors of the male contrast with the somber colors of the female, particularly when the males puff up

their chests during courting season. Mandarin ducks feed on plants and seeds such as beech nuts, as well as insects and small fish.

Mammals

Japanese serow (*kamoshika*; *Capricornis crispus*)

Although its Japanese name includes the word for deer (*shika*), the serow is actually an even-toed bovid, a furry kind of goat-antelope that has been designated a Special National Monument. Though the Japanese serow was once in danger of extinction, its numbers have now stabilized. Less than a meter in height even when fully grown, serows do not run from humans, but hold their ground and stare in silence. If you feel something is watching you in the forest, look around and you may spot one.

Amphibians

Forest green tree frog (*moriaogaeru*; *Zhangixalus arboreus*)

Though these frogs live in the forest as adults, they mate on branches that hang over the water, and lay their eggs there in a cluster of foam. After the tadpoles hatch, they emerge from the foam and fall into the water, where they mature before moving into the forest. These white egg clusters are particularly visible on the branches over Hyotannuma swamp.

Insects

Ezo-haru cicada (*ezoharuzemi*; *Terpnosia nigricosta*)

Yellowish brown with a slightly greenish head and thorax, this small cicada inhabits broadleaf forests, particularly beech forests, in cooler parts of Japan. Unlike the cicadas that emerge later in summer, it appears in the spring between May and June. The sound of Ezo-haru cicadas singing in unison is said to be even louder than birdsong. They stop singing just before rainfall and resume when the weather clears.

Fish

White-spotted char (*iwana*; *Salvelinus leucomaenis*)

These freshwater fish are brown and gray with white spots. They feed on aquatic plants, insects, smaller fish, and even frogs and salamanders to reach their adult size of over 20 centimeters. Though related to salmon, these chars do not migrate. They prefer colder waters, and are sometimes referred to as the “king of mountain streams” in Japan.

Sighting one in these swamps is rare; the most likely locations are from the deck of Tsutanuma, the small bridge near Kagaminuma, the runoff stream from Tsukinuma, and the small stream between Hyotannuma and Sugenuma.

Plants

Kikuzaki-ichige anemone (*kikuzaki-ichige*; *Anemone pseudoaltaica*)

This perennial wildflower got its Japanese name from its resemblance to a chrysanthemum (*kiku*). The white to purple blossoms open during the spring, before the leaves of the deciduous forest canopy block the sunlight from reaching the forest floor. This anemone likes damp soil, where it can grow up to 30 centimeters.

Mushrooms

Moonlight mushroom (*tsukiyotake*; *Omphalotus japonicus*)

This mountain mushroom appears from early summer through autumn, most often on the trunks of fallen beech trees. It ranges in color from orange to dark or purplish brown, and grows up to 25 centimeters in diameter. Noted for its luminescence, the mushroom glows a slightly green color in the dark—hence its name. Because it resembles other popular mushrooms, it is responsible for more poisoning cases than any other mushroom in Japan.

[Column]

Forest Survival Strategies

The Unbreakable

The cowtail pine (*haiinugaya*; *Cephalotaxus harringtonii*) is a short evergreen tree with

needle-like leaves. It is the only conifer commonly found in the Tsuta Forest, which is dominated by deciduous broadleaf trees. The trunk of the cowtail pine is extremely flexible, enabling it to survive by bending rather than breaking under the weight of the winter snows. These pines stand out in the winter as bright green spots in the forest after the leaves from the deciduous trees have fallen.

Reaching Skyward

Two species of vine flourish throughout the Tsuta Forest: the crimson glory (*yamabudo*; *Vitis coignetiae*) and the hardy kiwi (*sarunashi*; *Actinidia arguta*). These vines grow quickly and climb the trunks of trees in order to reach the sunlight above the canopy. The fruit of the crimson glory—whose Japanese name means “mountain grape”—has long been used as a food and medicinal source, and the vines themselves are often woven into baskets.