

Fish in Kikuchi Gorge

The clear, cold waters of Kikuchi Gorge provide a sanctuary for two species of fish. The *yamame* (“lady of the mountains,” landlocked *masu* salmon) is a fast swimmer that can grow up to 35 centimeters long. It is described as a shy species, extremely wary of potential threats, but can be seen gliding leisurely through pools in the gorge, where fishing is prohibited.

Changes in the environment of the Kikuchi River due to industrialization from the 1950s onward caused the *yamame* to disappear from the river’s upper reaches at one point, but restocking efforts in recent decades have paid off, and the population is now considered self-sustaining. The *yamame* is known to lay eggs in the broad Hirokawara area of the river, at the end of the longer walking path through the gorge, and this is also where most sightings occur. Several restaurants in the vicinity of Kikuchi Gorge serve grilled *yamame*, though these fish are sourced from a nearby fish farm.

Compared to the *yamame*, the *takahaya* (upstream fat minnow) is significantly smaller and somewhat more common in the gorge. Greenish-gold with a white belly, it grows up to 10 centimeters long and is found in the cold upper parts of rivers throughout western Japan. The *takahaya* has traditionally been a part of the everyday diet of inhabitants of mountainous areas, though it is not considered particularly tasty. As with the *yamame*, the Hirokawara area is the best place to try to catch a glimpse of the fish in Kikuchi Gorge.