

The Amami Nature Observation Forest

The Amami Nature Observation Forest sits atop the Nagakumo Mountains, a range in the northern part of the island. The forest is crisscrossed by over 2.5 kilometers of paths built for viewing a broad diversity of plants, including varieties of beech, and observing wildlife. Spring, when many of the plants flower, is the most colorful season. Mornings year-round are an ideal time for watching the many birds who come to feed on the earthworms and other insects on the forest floor. Among the wildlife to look for are birds like the Ryukyu robin, the Amami jay, the white-backed woodpecker, and the Amami thrush. Flowering orchids grow on the forest floor, and epiphytes, or “air plants,” can be found anchored to the rough bark of trees, where they survive on moisture and nutrients in the atmosphere.

The life cycle in the forest

In the summer, the air is filled with butterflies and the sounds of four varieties of cicada. At the end of the network of paths stands a large tree that illustrates the forest’s endless cycle of life and death. A sea fig that started from a seed deposited atop another tree many years ago has grown downward to completely envelop its host, eventually reaching the ground with its own roots. Cut off from sun and nutrients, the tree inside has died, leaving behind a perfect example of why sea figs are classified as a type of “strangler fig.”