

## Parasitic Plants

### **Yakushima birdlime / *Balanophora yakushimensis* / Yakushima tsuchitorimochi / ヤクシマツチトリモチ**

This is a parasitic plant that is endemic to Amami-Oshima and a few other nearby islands. It grows to a height of 3 to 10 centimeters on the roots of broadleaf trees in mountain forests, particularly those of the needlewood tree. It has short parasitic roots that fasten to and absorb nutrients from the host's tissue. The scaly leaves are brownish orange and grow directly from the underground rhizome. It produces clusters of small bright-red flowers that form oval nodules about 2 to 4 centimeters in diameter and resemble strawberries. On Amami-Oshima, it is most often found near the summit of Mt. Yuwandake, the island's highest peak.

### **Samurai's footman / *Mitrastemonaceae Yamamotoi* / Yakkoso / ヤッコソウ**

This odd-looking parasitic plant grows about 10 centimeters long on the roots of Amami-Oshima's chinquapin oaks. As a parasite, the plant doesn't need green leaves to produce its own nutrients, so its color is a pale white that darkens as it ages. Its vertical, tube-like flowers are bisexual, and appear on the surface of the ground from mid-October. At the end of the male flowering stage, the stamen "cap" falls off, leaving the round column of the female flowering stage. When small birds and insects come to feed on the nectar that accumulates at the base of the leaves, they inadvertently contribute to the plant's pollination. The Japanese name, *yakkoso*, comes from its resemblance to the traditional figure of a *yakko*, a samurai's footman of the Edo period (1603–1867).