

## **The Urauchi River: Japan's Most Biodiverse Waterway**

The Urauchi River is, at 19 kilometers, the longest river in Okinawa Prefecture, and up to 200 meters wide and 15 meters deep depending on the season and other factors. Size, however, is not all that matters about the Urauchi. It is also the most biodiverse river in the entire country, containing over 400 species of fish—10 percent of all fish species in Japan—of which over 40 are endangered. Rich in nutritious phytoplankton, and with elaborate roots offering safety from predators, the mangrove forests on the riverbank provide the perfect environment for fish fry to grow.

Only the first 8 kilometers of the river from the sea are navigable; beyond that, rocks and waterfalls prevent boats' progress. Upriver, brackish water gives way to fresh water, and dense mangrove forest to broadleaf subtropical jungle. Around 6 kilometers from the sea is the site of Inaba, a hamlet that prospered by producing rice and charcoal until it was abandoned in the early 1970s. With no electricity, the children of Inaba had to walk a total of 12 kilometers to school and back every day over mountain paths.

**[193/Target 150-200]**