**The Forest Awakens: Spring in Urabandai**

Spring arrives in Urabandai as the deep accumulation of snow starts to melt in April, and buds and new shoots appear in the forests and wetlands. The Japanese black bear (*Ursus thibetanus japonicus*) emerges from months of hibernation to feed on bamboo shoots and beech sprouts.

While the bears forage in the forest, the Japanese black salamander (*Hynobius nigrescens*) also comes out of hibernation, feeding on insects, spiders, and freshwater crabs. The salamanders begin to spawn in ponds and swamps around mid-April. Caterpillar larvae consume the abundant new leaves of alder trees, transforming into green hairstreak butterflies with iridescent green wings. The great spotted woodpecker (*Dendrocopos major*) flits through the trees in a flash of black, white, and red feathers, searching for insects, seeds, and nuts.

The white blooms of *mizubasho* (swamp lantern; *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*) dot the wetland around Oguninuma Pond. Around Sakuratoge Pass, vast colonies of North Japanese hill cherry trees (*Cerasus sargentii*) bloom in a palette of pale pink and white in late April. Cherry trees flower on the island of Sakurajima against a backdrop of Mt. Bandai in May, their blooms reflected in the waters of Lake Hibara.