

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.