

An Interconnected Ecosystem

The vigor of the biodiverse natural environment of Urabandai is based on the interdependence of its plants and animals. For instance, the berries of the Japanese rowan (*Sorbus commixta*) provide food for many bird species. Birds in turn help propagate the shrub when the seeds in their droppings take root. Studies have shown the seeds cannot germinate until the protective fruit around them is broken down during digestion.

Ants and bees are both effective pollinators of the buckwheat plant and play a significant role in increasing the crop's yield. Local communities harvest buckwheat to make soba noodles, tea, and other products.

The Japanese black bear (*Ursus thibetanus japonicus*) eats *mizubasho* (swamp lantern; *Lysichiton camtschatcensis*) which acts as a laxative and emetic. The calcium oxalate contained within the plant helps the bear flush waste from its body—a process that is especially important after hibernation. Each plant and animal, no matter how small, plays an important role in maintaining the balance of Urabandai's ecosystem.