

The Topography of Mt. Bandai: Biodiverse Landscapes

Volcanic activity over a period of hundreds of thousands of years left its stamp on the mountains, lakes, wetlands, and other natural features of the Bandai-Azuma and Inawashiro region. The mineral-rich volcanic soil supports a variety of plant species, and the high-altitude wetlands are habitats for alpine plants and an array of insects, which in turn attract other wildlife.

A major eruption of Mt. Nekomadake around 400,000 years ago formed Oguninuma Pond and its surrounding wetland. Water accumulated in the crater left by the partial collapse of the mountain's volcanic chamber and eventually became a pond. A wetland formed southwest of the pond, where soil drainage is poor. Oguninuma Pond covers 43 hectares, and the wetland spans approximately 100 hectares. Lake Inawashiro to the south formed following an eruption of Mt. Bandai around 40,000 years ago. It has an area of 10,330 hectares and is the fourth-largest lake in Japan.

Mt. Bandai's eruption in 1888 devastated the surrounding area with ash, debris, and mudflows, but it also created ponds and lakes through the damming of rivers. The largest of these bodies of water are Lake Hibara (1,070 ha), Lake Akimoto (360 ha), and Lake Onogawa (170 ha). The eruption also created the Goshikinuma Ponds, 30 wetland areas and ponds with distinct coloration caused by volcanic sediments and mineral particles such as aluminum silicate, iron, copper, and manganese.

In the early twentieth century, the government and local communities embarked on a program of replanting to rejuvenate the terrain that had been left barren by the eruption. Today, the Urabandai area is internationally recognized as an Important Bird Area, and its forests, lakes, and wetlands are a thriving ecosystem that supports diverse plants and animals.