

## **Isonokami Jingū's Sacred Chickens**

At Isonokami Jingū, the tranquil silence of the shrine grounds is regularly broken by the crowing of roosters. The shrine is home to between two and five dozen chickens, a tradition that began when the first few birds were donated in the 1980s. Since then, new chickens have regularly been gifted to the shrine's growing flock of both roosters and hens. Such birds are kept at a handful of other shrines, including Ise Jingū in Mie Prefecture. In East Asia, chickens have long been seen as protectors and wards against evil. This association can be traced back to sixth-century China, where, in some areas, it was common to paste images of chickens on gates and doorways to repel demons.

In Japan, as in much of the world, roosters hold significance as heralds of dawn. The country's creation story describes how a multitude of deities gathered roosters and made them crow to entice the sun goddess Amaterasu out of hiding and restore light to the world.

Chickens of various breeds hunt for insects and strut proudly around the

shrine's shady grounds. Among them are "long-crowing cocks"

(*naganakidori*), which were bred to crow longer and more often.