

The Plants and Wildlife of Oze

Oze is home to a rich diversity of plant and animal life, making it a vital ecological region. Over 900 species of vascular plants and many animal species, ranging from small dragonflies to the Asian black bear, thrive in the highlands and mountains of the area. The mountain streams are abundant with fish, including freshwater char, a delicacy in the village of Hinoemata, Fukushima.

A national treasure

Alpine plants add seasonal color to Oe Marsh and its surroundings, creating vistas that have drawn generations of tourists. In early summer, azaleas brighten the landscape with red-orange hues. Mid-summer brings the yellows of keyflower, a type of orchid, and day lilies. In the autumn, Japanese rowan trees are bright with red berries.

Botanist and mountaineer Takeda Hisayoshi (1883–1972) publicly praised Oze as a “national treasure.” He published numerous academic

papers on alpine plants, as well as a travelogue of his first visit to Oze.

Makino Tomitaro (1862–1957), considered the father of Japanese botany, also conducted research and collected plant specimens in Oze.

The lifeblood of local culture

Freshwater char is a staple for communities in Hinoemata. It can be fried, grilled with salt, or served as sashimi. Hot sake is poured over the roasted bones of the fish to create a drink called *kotsuzake*. The grilled meat of char is also used to produce *iyō* miso, a regional variety of soybean paste.