

Animals of the Minami Alps

From bears to butterflies

The lush green forests of the Minami Alps are the habitat of over 30 kinds of mammals. These include the Asian black bear, the Japanese serow, the Japanese macaque monkey, the Japanese boar, the Japanese red fox, and the Japanese stoat.

Several pairs of the endangered Japanese golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos japonica*) are also thought to be living in the Minami Alps. With a wingspan of two meters, this is one of the largest birds in Japan. It nests in cliffs and, as the apex predator of its habitat, eats rabbits, foxes, stoats, and snakes.

Visitors, however, are much more likely to see the rock ptarmigan (*Lagopus muta japonica*), a ground-feeding bird of the grouse family that lives amid the dwarf stone pines around the mountaintops. Its plumage changes from

mottled gray in the warmer months to white in the winter, providing it with season-appropriate camouflage in both rocky and snowy environments.

Another bird that lives in the dwarf stone pines of the alpine zone is the spotted nutcracker (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*). It can be recognized by its long bill, spotted dark brown plumage, and a white terminal band on the undertail.

One colorful creature to watch out for in the summer months is the

Japanese orange-tip butterfly (*Anthocharis cardamines nipponica*). Only found on a few mountains on the main island of Honshu, it came to Japan during the Ice Age when the archipelago was connected to the Asian continent by land bridges, later moving up to higher altitudes as the climate warmed.