

Alpine Ecology

Mt. Hakusan is Japan's westernmost mountain with an alpine zone. The hardy plants and animals that live there have adapted to the scarce resources, short growing seasons, and harsh winds, but the alpine ecosystem itself is fragile. The plants and animals on Hakusan's summit are like survivors stranded on an island, unable to leave the small area that supports them. Climate change poses an especially big threat to these species, as warmer temperatures could render the environment unsuitable for them and leave them without a habitat.

Alpine Animal Life

Mt. Hakusan's alpine zone has many animal residents despite being covered in snow for half the year. Birds such as the ground-dwelling alpine accentor and Japanese accentor forage and raise their offspring among volcanic boulders near the summit. In summer, fields of alpine flowers attract butterflies such as the Arran and *benihikage*, both of which have

brown wings with orange-colored markings. Mammals, too, live at these heights. Agile ermines, which are brown in summer but turn stark white in winter, hunt among the rocks for small rodents such as the Azumi shrew.