

## **Plants and Animals of Daisetsuzan National Park**

Daisetsuzan National Park is one of Japan's largest national parks. It encompasses the Tokachi Mountain Range, the Ishikari Mountain Range, and the Daisetsuzan Volcanic Group, and includes the highest peak in Hokkaido, Mt. Asahidake (2,291 m).

The alpine climate of Daisetsuzan supports a wide variety of plants and animals. There are over 200 alpine flower species, including Kurile cherry, Aleutian avens, and alpine violet. Many of these plant species likely migrated from North Asia, regions around the Sea of Okhotsk and the Bering Sea, and Japan's main island. Primary-growth forests of red spruce and Sakhalin fir thrive in the subalpine zone of Mt. Asahidake. This habitat supports resident and migratory birds, including the Eurasian bullfinch, red-flanked bluetail, and dark-sided flycatcher. High-elevation meadows have colonies of common sundew and cotton grass as well as cold-climate dragonflies like the Siberian skimmer.

Some flora and fauna are surviving species from the last ice age, over 20,000 years ago. Sea levels were about 100 meters lower than today, and Hokkaido was connected by a land bridge to the Eurasian continent via the island of Sakhalin. As temperatures and sea levels rose, the habitats of these species became limited to isolated areas of the mountains. Among these survivors of earlier times is a species of high-altitude butterfly, a species of wingless grasshopper, and the Japanese pika, a small mammal that resembles a rabbit.