



Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest



Mammals (Japanese name, scientific name)

- ①Asian Black Bear (Tsuki-no-waguma, *Ursus thibetanus*)
Reaching some 120 cm in head and body length, these bears weigh up to 60-120 kg and often have a crescent-shaped mark on their chests. Although usually a gentle omnivorous animal that mainly eats plants, it can become aggressive if surprised. It is advisable to wear a "bear bell" when walking to forewarn the animal of your presence. Hibernates during the harsh winter.
- ②Japanese Serow (Nihon Kamoshika, *Capricornis crispus*)
This herbivorous territorial mammal is endemic to Japan and resembles a deer, but is in fact related to cattle. It is designated as a special natural treasure. Adults reach about 80 cm from head to haunches, and weigh about 30-50 kg.
- ③Japanese Giant Flying Squirrel (Musasabi, *Petaurista leucogenys*)
Amongst the world's largest flying squirrels (about 80 cm outstretched including the tail), these herbivorous creatures are nocturnal and endemic to Japan, feeding mainly on leaf buds, fruit and nuts.
- ④Japanese Squirrel (Risu, *Sciurus lis*)
Also endemic to Japan, this species grows to about 35 cm including the tail. Diurnal and omnivorous, squirrels feed mainly on plants. In autumn, food such as walnuts and chestnuts is stockpiled in the ground or between branches.
- ⑤Wild Boar (Inoshishi, *Sus scrofa*)
Fully grown adults reach about 130 cm in length, and a male can weigh up to about 70-150 kg. Boars are omnivorous, feeding mainly on plants and roots, and are prodigious breeders. Sows form family groups with their young. We can sometimes find traces of their playing in the mud in the forest, or disturbed ground where they have rooted around for food.
- ⑥Japanese dormouse (Yamane, *Glirulus japonicus*)
This diminutive species only reaches about 12 cm including its tail, is endemic to Japan, and is a special natural treasure. The dormouse is omnivorous, feeding mainly on insects, and also hibernates during the harsh winter.

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* Photos by Picchio (except for the wild boar and Olivier Messiaen)

About Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest

Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest – located in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture – is one of four national wild bird forests in Japan. The Karuizawa area has a cool climate with an annual average temperature of about 8°C, lying at an altitude of about 1,000 meters. The sanctuary includes forests within the Joshin'etsu Kogen National Park and Asama National Wildlife Protection Area. Here, the natural landscapes and wildlife habitats are protected.

In recent years, about eighty species of birds and forty species of mammals have been recorded in the sanctuary. Four of these birds and twenty species of mammals are endemic to Japan.

The forest covers around 100 hectares and is designated as a national forest under the jurisdiction of the Forestry Agency. The walking trails and rest areas are maintained by the Ministry of the Environment. The forest is mostly deciduous, with a mixture of planted larches and broad-leaved trees, but also has secondary forest areas mainly of water oaks. Flowers such as violets and "azumaichige" (*Anemone raddeana*) bloom in spring, and birdsong filters through the dazzling fresh green leaves in early summer. Dragonflies and numerous other insects are in abundance during the summer. The autumnal hues are spectacular – and once the leaves have fallen, in winter many animal footprints (such as hare, wild boar, deer and fox) can be seen in the snow.



Birds (Japanese name, scientific name)

- ①Copper Pheasant (Yamadori, *Symaticus soemmerringii*)
This pheasant is endemic to Japan and resident in the sanctuary. It is popular with foreign ornithologists. The male sports a long tail, and can reach up to 125 cm. They live in thick woods and feed on fruit and nuts.
- ②Japanese Green Woodpecker (Aogera, *Picus awakera*)
Also endemic to Japan and resident in the sanctuary, these birds measure up to 29 cm. Males have prominent red markings on their heads and whistle during the breeding season. They feed mainly on insects such as ants.
- ③Japanese Wagtail (Seguro-sekirei, *Motacila grandis*)
Endemic to Japan, these sanctuary residents grow to 21 cm at full length. Omnivorous and often found near water.
- ④Japanese Accentor (Kayakuguri, *Prunella rubida*)
A winter visitor to the sanctuary that is also endemic to Japan. Around 14-cm long, they frequent shrubs and can often be found on mountain paths and under thickets.
- ⑤Yellow Bunting (Nojiko, *Emberiza sulphurata*)
A summer visitor around 14 cm in length, their only known breeding sites are in Honshu in Japan. Their preferred habitat is deciduous broad-leaved forests.
- ⑥Japanese Waxwing (Hirenjyaku, *Bombycilla japonica*)
An occasional winter visitor around 17.5-cm long, they mainly feed on fruit, nuts and grass seeds. In winter, they often gather around mistletoe.
- ⑦Japanese Tit (Shijyuukara, *Parus minor*)
Just 14.5 cm fully grown, this permanent resident is perhaps the easiest bird to observe in this forest, and is also found in residential areas.
- ⑧Japanese Thrush (Kurotsugumi, *Turdus cardis*)
A summer visitor to the sanctuary, this 21.5-cm long songbird fills the air with its cheerful and extensive repertoire, often initiating the dawn chorus.
- ⑨Narcissus Flycatcher (Kibitaki, *Ficedula narcissina*)
A summer visitor that has become more populous in recent years. Just 13.5-cm long, the female is olive-brown and its song has earned it the moniker "piccolo player of the forest".
- ⑩Blue-and-white Flycatcher (Ooruri, *Cyanoptila cyanomelana*)
This 16.5-cm long summer visitor enjoys mountain stream habitats. Noted for its beautiful songs, and is considered one of the three most beautiful songbirds in Japan. The female is dark brown and known to alert other birds to danger with its cry.
- ⑪Ural Owl (Fukurou, *Strix uralensis*)
This nocturnal resident mainly feeds on mice. It has evolved stealthy wings and asymmetrical ears that precisely pinpoint sound sources to become a lethal danger to its prey.

Notable Individuals associated with Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest

Godo Nakanishi (1895-1984)



Godo Nakanishi was the founder of The Wild Bird Society of Japan. He was also a wild bird researcher and poet. He travelled the length and breadth of the Japanese archipelago to watch birds in their natural habitat, and encouraged wild birds to live unconfined in the garden of his Tokyo residence. He was a naturalist with broad interests, including a fascination for insects and freshwater fish.

In his day, wild birds were often caught and displayed in cages or kept for hunting.

He was instrumental in creating the concept of wild birds being of interest in their own habitat and created the word "yacho", meaning "wild bird", which hitherto did not exist in Japanese. He worked hard to protect wild birds and encouraged the discipline of ornithology with his slogan: "Let wild birds be wild."

Godo often visited the Karuizawa area and remarked, "Karuizawa can be considered one of the three major wild bird habitats in Japan, as we can hear the songs of forty species." Godo always stayed at the same hotel and Kasuke Hoshino, the then-owner, regarded Godo as his mentor and actively hosted bird-watching events, a novelty in Japan at the time. This history is part of the reason why a National Wild Bird Forest was established in Karuizawa. His spirit and activities here remain alive and well to this day.

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)



Olivier Messiaen was a French composer, organist and ornithologist. He found birdsong fascinating and notated many examples worldwide. He wrote many pieces of music that incorporated birdsong as a motif, such as "The Blackbird" for flute and piano (1952). He was also influenced by Japanese music.

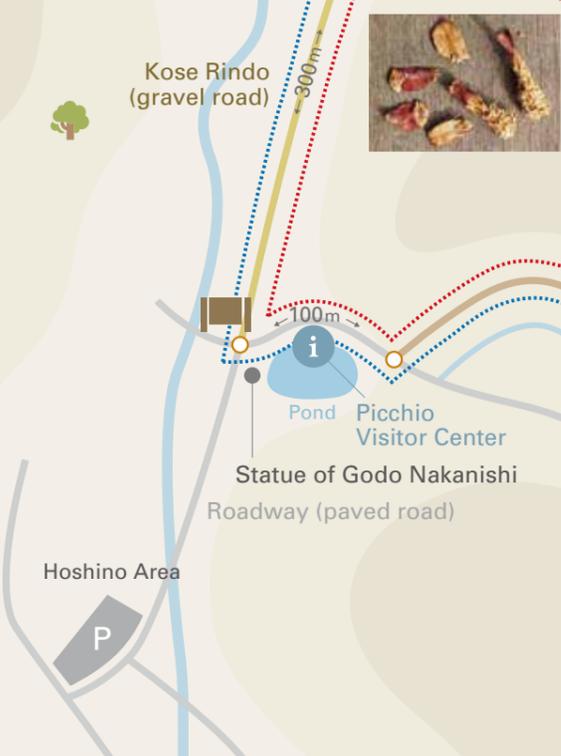
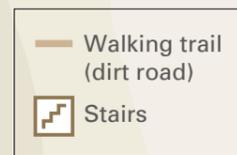
Messiaen first came to Japan in 1962 to perform in a concert and visited Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest on the recommendation of a French ornithologist.

Kasuke Hoshino, the owner of the hotel where Messiaen stayed, acted as a guide and prepared a tape recorder for him. Messiaen, however, did not use it, saying, "Birds don't just sing freely as they like. Bird songs have their own different repertoires. Thus, we won't know the strength and the timing of bird chirps before we actually hear them."

Messiaen notated the birdsong of 26 species, including bush warblers, Siberian blue robins, Japanese tits and narcissus flycatchers on his large music scores, which sound like a collection of avian choruses. From these birdsong scores, he composed "The Birds of Karuizawa", the sixth movement of "Sept Haikai".

Observation Map

The Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest (covering about 100 hectares) is replete with such trees as chestnuts and larches, which support a substantial range and number of animals, including about eighty bird species, throughout the year. There are also Asian black bears, Japanese serows, flying squirrels, deer, small mammals and a profusion of flowers in spring and summer.



i Picchio Visitor Center

This is managed by a private organization (Picchio) and you can get information on nature such as wild birds here.

Be wary of unexpected encounters with bears

The forest is the natural habitat of Asian black bears, which can be dangerous if startled. When walking, take suitable precautions such as using a bear bell, so that the bears will hear you and keep their distance. If you do encounter a bear, back away slowly and calmly, but do not run as this may further alarm them. You may borrow a bear bell from the visitor center (free of charge).

① Water bathing spot for wild birds

This shallow and slow-flowing stream in the forest is often visited by wild birds to bathe. Popular bathing spots include sites where their natural enemies have difficulty finding them, such as streams with a canopy of branches.

② Copper pheasant observation points

This famous pheasant can often be seen around this point.

③ Pumice stones

The pumice stones lying all over the ground in the National Wild Bird Forest are from a huge volcanic eruption of Mt Asama in 1738. You can see the layer of pumice in the collapsing slope along the stairs.

④ Feeding marks of Japanese giant flying squirrels

There are many Japanese red pines and oaks around this point. Marks can sometimes be found left on pinecones and acorns eaten by both squirrels and their giant flying namesakes.

⑤ Conservation of grassland

Grassland is conserved to improve the biodiversity of the National Wild Bird Forest. Every year, a local volunteer group* clears away bushes to protect the grassland.

*Donguri Undo No Kai (volunteer group)

This group has been growing saplings from acorns in the forest and then replanting them on the foot of the mountain since 1991, so the current woodland that mainly consists of recently introduced larches is gradually restored to its natural forest environment.

⑥ Mt. Asama viewpoint

Mt. Asama (rising to 2,568 meters above sea level) is one of Japan's most active volcanoes, with the last significant eruption in 2015. Much of the geology of the National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest has been created by the volcano and its previous eruptions.

⑦ ⑧ Remains of charcoal kilns

Charcoal is made by heating wood in an airless environment, and was a common source of fuel in pre-industrial Japan. The remains of two ancient charcoal kilns can be found in the forest. Oak was often used to make good quality charcoal.

⑨ Wren observation point

The local name for the wren is "Misosazai", which roughly translates to "small waterside bird", and indeed this tiny bird is often found alongside streams. Considering its diminutive size, it has a surprisingly loud song.

Enjoying the Karuizawa National Wild Bird Sanctuary Forest

This forest is situated within Asama National Wildlife Protection Area and protected as habitats of birds and mammals. We can find not only 24 species of Japanese endemic birds and animals but also seasonal flowers and remains of charcoal kilns that suggest close relations between human beings and nature.

Bird watching

Around the entrance to the National Wild Bird Forest, we can observe many small birds such as tits in the low-lying shrubs that thrive in the sunshine. Along small streams, we sometimes find not only waterside birds like wrens and gray wagtails, but also other birds that come to bathe. Near the man-made Donguri-Ike (meaning "Acorn pond"), copper pheasants can sometimes be observed. Around the grasslands, such birds as Siberian meadow buntings and long-tailed rosefinches can be seen.

Animal tracking

In addition to the endemic Japanese giant flying squirrels, one of the world's largest flying squirrels, many mammals inhabit this forest, including wild boar and deer. In winter, you can also enjoy tracking these animals, by searching for their footprints on the snow. Most mammals are more active in the evening, but it is recommended to join a tour led by a professional guide for evening observations because Asian black bears are also active from early spring to early winter.



Spring (April to May)

Summer (June to August)

Fall (September to November)

Winter (December to March)

Protection and management of wildlife in Karuizawa town

About three quarters of Karuizawa Town is classified as forest, and many of the 14,000 holiday homes are built in such woodland. As a result, the discord between human activity and wildlife – notably the Asian black bears and monkeys – has been a long-standing problem in the town. In particular, Asian black bears, herbivorous and timid in nature, often cause damage to garbage dumps, whose smell attracts the bears (this occurred 130 times in 1999).

Most of these bears eventually had to be put down because they gradually became used to people. Karuizawa Town, however, has been striving hard to create a town where people and wildlife such as these magnificent bears can harmoniously live together without fear. Firstly, bears living near residential areas are caught and collared with wireless transmitters. Then they are released deeper into the forest. The town checks the locations of the bears every evening. If they approach residential areas, a specially trained bear dog from the U.S.A. and a handler drive the bears back into the forest. In this way, both bears and residents have been protected.

As a result of these efforts, ursine damage to garbage dumps has been almost eliminated and the number of bears that have had to be destroyed has fallen markedly. Karuizawa Town, in recognition of its various conservation efforts including the above, was awarded the Minister of the Environment Award for Contributions to Nature by the Ministry of the Environment in 2011.

