

Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island

Outstanding Universal Value / Valeur universelle exceptionnelle

(x) Biodiversity / Biodiversité

An important area for biodiversity conservation, with many internationally rare endemic species due to unique biological evolution reflecting the process of formation of the islands

Une région importante pour la protection de la biodiversité qui comprend de nombreuses espèces endémiques rares dans le monde, et où l'évolution biologique unique reflète le processus de formation des îles

Rich biodiversity

Although the area of the World Heritage property covers less than 0.5% of Japan's land area, it supports a large proportion of the fauna and flora in Japan. For example, there are 1,819 vascular plants that account for 26% of the total vascular plant species in Japan, about 740 terrestrial and inland water vertebrates (57%), and about 6,150 insects (21%).

The fauna and flora of the property include 95 globally threatened species listed in the IUCN Red List and more than 540 threatened species listed in the Red List of the Ministry of the Environment, Japan. In addition, many endemic species which are only found here are distributed. In particular, a high rate of endemism is observed for terrestrial mammals (62%), terrestrial reptiles (64%), and amphibians (86%), and all of the freshwater crab species of Potamonidae are endemic to the area. The area is therefore extremely important for biodiversity conservation.

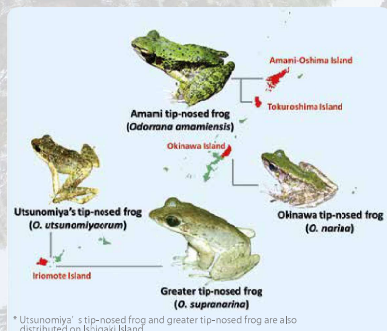
Unique biological evolution reflecting the process of formation of the islands

The species richness, and large number and high proportion of threatened species and endemic species, are all interrelated and have resulted from the geological history of the Ryukyu Chain. The Ryukyu Chain was once an eastern margin of the Eurasian Continent, but tectonic movements caused separation from the Continent, forming an archipelago of small islands. The terrestrial species there became isolated on small islands and went through unique processes of evolution. For this reason, many examples of endemic species in this area are clearly shown in non-flying terrestrial vertebrate groups and plants that were not able to cross the straits with ease.

Among the endemic species, "relict endemic species" and "new endemic species" are representative of the biological evolutionary processes that reflect the formation of the islands. The Ryukyu long-haired rat and Amami rabbit are representative of relict endemic species that were once widely distributed on the Continent and other areas, but were isolated to the islands of the Ryukyu Chain and have survived, retaining their ancient forms, even after their ancestor species on the Continent became extinct. New endemic species, on the other hand, are those that have evolved to adapt to their respective island environments, such as ground geckos and tip-nosed frogs.



Amami violet (*Viola amamiana*)
Listed in both the IUCN and Ministry of the Environment Red List



* Utsunomiya's tip-nosed frog and greater tip-nosed frog are also distributed on Ishigaki Island

Speciation of tip-nosed frogs to each island

Protection and Management of Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island

Protection du Patrimoine Naturel Mondial de Île Amami-Oshima, île Tokunoshima, partie nord de l'île d'Okinawa et île d'Iriomote

The four islands containing the World Heritage property are inhabited, and the places for residents' lives are close to the habitats of wildlife. To enable the coexistence of protection of the property and the people's livelihoods, the buffer zones were set up. This property is the only natural heritage site in Japan where a buffer zone has been established.

In addition, Surrounding Conservation Areas encompassing the property and the buffer zones are designated to implement a broader range of conservation and management measures necessary for addressing threats to the property such as invasive alien species and illegal collection of rare species.

Under the Comprehensive Management Plan that encompasses the entire four islands covering these different management zones, many stakeholders are working together to ensure effective management.

Protected Areas in the Property

Amamigunto National Park	
Special Protection Zone :	5,094 ha
Special Zone :	9,061 ha
Yambaru National Park	
Special Protection Zone :	2,949 ha
Special Zone :	4,772 ha
Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park	
Special Protection Zone :	4,624 ha
Special Zone :	16,198 ha

(Under jurisdiction of MOE)

Examples of Efforts / Exemples d'actions



Mongoose busters Chasseurs de mangoustes

On Amami-Oshima Island and northern Okinawa Island, teams of about 30 people called "mongoose busters" are organized. They capture and monitor alien mongooses systematically using detection dogs. As a result of these efforts, not a single animal was captured on Amami-Oshima Island in FY2019 and FY 2020, suggesting that the situation is close to eradication. In northern Okinawa Island, fences have been installed to prevent mongooses from invading from the central and southern parts of the island, where the animal is densely distributed.

Proper keeping of pet cats Surveillance des chats domestiques

Predation of rare species by cats has been confirmed in the property. There is also concern about the impact of disease transmission to rare species. To address this issue, all 4 regions have enacted ordinances on the proper keeping of pet cats to promote microchipping of owner information and ensure that cats are kept indoors.

Roadkill countermeasures Mesures contre la mortalité des animaux sur la route

In order to tackle roadkills of rare wildlife species such as the Amami rabbit, Okinawa rail, and Iriomote cat, signs to warn about frequent accidents and fences to prevent road intrusion have been installed. Also, traffic accident prevention campaigns are conducted for residents and tourists.



Tourism management Gestion du tourisme

All 4 regions have developed tourism master plans and basic visitor management plans that set out rules of use and promote appropriate tourism use. In Iriomote Island, the Taketomi Town Tourist Guide Ordinance enforced in April 2020 makes it mandatory to obtain a license and attend a training course to conduct a nature tourism guide business. Licensed guides have knowledge about the natural environment and fulfill a range of other requirements, such as water rescue certification.



Forest road patrols by local stakeholders Patrouilles sur les routes forestières par des organisations locales

In northern Okinawa Island, the Ministry of the Environment, Okinawa Prefecture, Kunigami Village Forestry Association, and local people work together to patrol forest roads in order to monitor the use of forest roads and prevent illegal collection of wildlife. They also disseminate information on various laws and regulations relating to the prevention of illegal collection. Since 2018, a cooperation system with police officers has been in place and joint patrols have been carried out to detect poachers.



Promotion of public awareness by private sectors Sensibilisation du public par le secteur privé

In 2019, in order to promote the inscription of this property, the natural World Heritage promotion joint consortiums were established in both Kagoshima and Okinawa prefectures, consisting of more than 30 private companies and organizations in each prefecture. These consortiums currently conduct activities such as public awareness promotion and protection of rare species and the natural environment in cooperation with government agencies. They also contribute to local communities through the use of the natural environment and works to promote local development.