



Alpine Birds Sing Through Brief Summers

When climbing Mt. Hakusan, you may encounter a variety of birds. Listen carefully as you ascend, and you'll hear the birds' beautiful songs. Birds thrive in their respective environments such as forests of beech, Maries' fir, and dwarf stone pine. Here let us look at several bird species that live and raise their young in the harsh alpine environment.

Small Birds Fly Among the Dwarf Stone Pines and Rocks

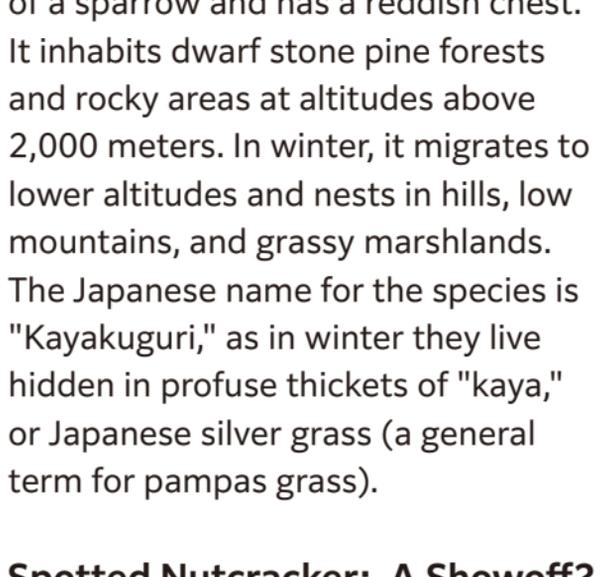
Alpine Accentor: A Beautiful Voice



The alpine accentor is a typical bird found high in the mountains. It's slightly larger than a sparrow, has a stout brown body and gray head, and makes a beautiful chirping sound. Around June to August, they build their nests out of dead grass and stalks in crevices between rocks in the alpine zone above 2,000 meters, with the females then laying three or four blue eggs. The birds spend the harsh winters in deep valleys at elevations of around 1,000 meters. As they are not particularly afraid of humans, hikers often encounter them when climbing Mt. Hakusan.

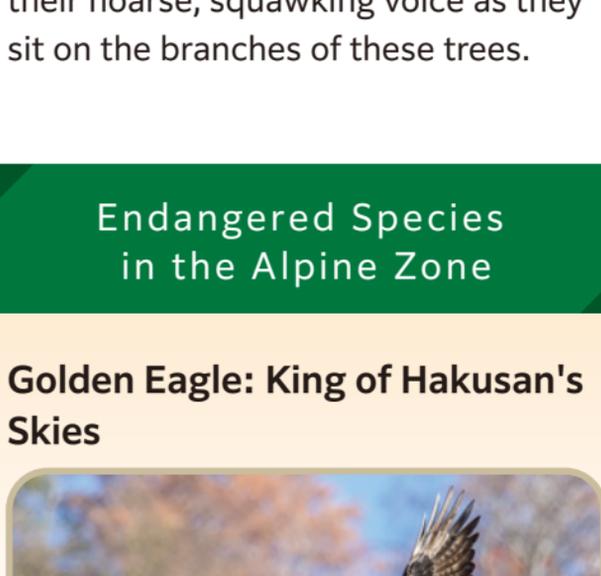
*Photo courtesy of the Hakusan Nature Conservation Center

Japanese Accentor: Alpine Symbol



Along with the alpine accentor, the Japanese accentor is another representative bird of the high mountains. This bird is about the size of a sparrow and has a reddish chest. It inhabits dwarf stone pine forests and rocky areas at altitudes above 2,000 meters. In winter, it migrates to lower altitudes and nests in hills, low mountains, and grassy marshlands. The Japanese name for the species is "Kayakuguri," as in winter they live hidden in profuse thickets of "kaya," or Japanese silver grass (a general term for pampas grass).

Spotted Nutcracker: A Showoff?

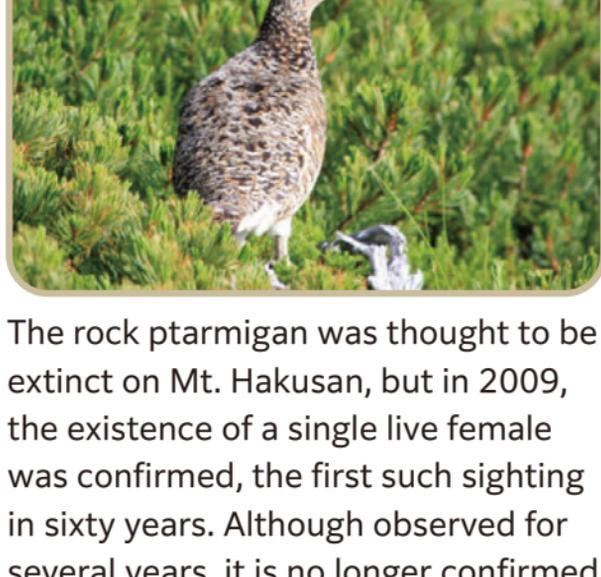


The spotted nutcracker is a bird commonly seen in Mt. Hakusan's alpine and subalpine zones. It is a member of the crow family, but measuring around 30 cm in length, it is smaller than crows encountered in urban areas. Its entire body is dark brown and covered with white spots. These spots look like stars shining in the night sky, hence the Japanese name "Hoshigarasu" ("starry crow"). Its favorite food is the seeds of the dwarf stone pine and Maries' fir.

These birds are easy to identify by their hoarse, squawking voice as they sit on the branches of these trees.

Endangered Species in the Alpine Zone

Golden Eagle: King of Hakusan's Skies



With a wingspan of over two meters, the golden eagle is one of Japan's largest birds. It is the symbol of Mt. Hakusan as well as the prefectural bird of Ishikawa Prefecture. It soars powerfully and majestically through the skies above Mt. Hakusan. With no natural predators, the golden eagle sits at the ecosystem's apex, but destruction of its habitat due to development has caused such a decline in its population that extinction is a concern. At the foot of Mt. Hakusan or while hiking, if you're lucky, you might catch sight of a golden eagle soaring slowly in the sky.

*Photo courtesy of Katsushi Yamane

Rock Ptarmigan: Rediscovered!



The rock ptarmigan was thought to be extinct on Mt. Hakusan, but in 2009, the existence of a single live female was confirmed, the first such sighting in sixty years. Although observed for several years, it is no longer confirmed to be living there. In the past, it was dubbed "thunderbird," and during the Edo period, it was worshipped as a protection against disasters such as fires and lightning.

A rock ptarmigan roams about a dwarf stone pine forest. If you happen to spot one, remain quiet while observing it.

Chubu Regional Environment Office, Ministry of the Environment/Association for Conservation of Circum-Hakusan Area

