National Parks of Japan

Towada-Hachimantai National Park

The Tsuta Bird Sanctuary Nature trail MAP

The complete trail offers visible examples of the transition of this land from wetlands to forest, and from a damp environment of mainly Japanese horse chestnut and Japanese wingnut to an all-beech forest.

To Aomori City

Tsutanuma: The largest of the six swamps, this one also has the best view of Mt. Akakura, the origin of the debris avalanche that created the area's landscape.

蔦沼
Tsutanuma Swamp

[Kagaminuma–Tsutanuma] 15 mins

[Tsutanuma–Tsuta Onsen] 10 mins

鏡沼
Kagaminuma Swamp

Kagaminuma: This is another artificial swamp, created by diverting the water from Tsukinuma. The bridge near the outlet is a good place for viewing white-spotted char.

Tsuta Akanuma Trail

[Tsukinuma–Kagaminuma] 5 mins

月沼
Tsukinuma Swamp

[Naganuma–Tsukinuma] 20 mins

Tsukinuma: This small swamp, surrounded by forest, is fed by spring water.

You Are Here

Tsuta Onsen

The grave of Omachi Keigetsu

長沼
Naganuma Swamp

瓢箪沼
Hyotannuma Swamp

To Towada City, Lake Towada

Gazebo

Naganuma: The size of this swamp expands and contracts depending on the season and the rainfall.

[Sugenuma–Hyotannuma] 15 mins

[Naganuma–Sugenuma] 25 mins

Hyotannuma: This swamp, once shaped like a gourd (*hyotan*), is shrinking as it turns into marshland.

Sugenuma: The western end of this artificially created swamp is a tree-dotted marshland that is in the preliminary stage of becoming dry land.

菅沼
Sugenuma Swamp

Gazebo

Circuit 90 mins

The circular main trail is approximately 3 kilometers long, and takes about 90 minutes to walk at a leisurely pace. A back-and-forth trip on the level 500-meter trail to Tsutanuma swamp is recommended for those who don't want to make the entire circuit.

Legend

- Tsuta Bird Sanctuary Trail
- Directional signage may be limited
- Tsuta Bird Sanctuary Rest House
- Bus Stop
- Restrooms
- Parking

0 100 200m

The trail is closed to unaccompanied visitors from late November to early May due to the heavy snowfall. Guided tours on skis or snowshoes, however, are available.

\ Tips on how to walk /

The Seismic Event

The landscape of the Tsuta Forest area was created by a debris avalanche from Mt. Akakura, one of seven peaks of the Minami Hakkoda Mountains, which were formed by volcanic activity between 800,000 and 300,000 years ago. Sometime between 100,000 and 15,000 years ago, the eastern side of Mt. Akakura collapsed, and volcanic rocks and ash carried down the mountain by the avalanche transformed the entire valley.
Large lava and pyroclastic rocks can be found throughout the forest, particularly between Sugenuma and Naganuma. These are from the original volcanic activity that formed the mountain and were transported by the debris avalanche to their present location.

Water Underground

Water is a major force in the growth of the Tsuta Forest. Underground channels are everywhere, as the groundwater table is very near the surface. In certain parts of the trail, there are damp spots that never dry—in fact, there are few completely dry areas anywhere on the forest floor. If you stop and listen quietly, you can often hear the sound of water from various sources making its way through the forest.

The Micro-Universe

While walking on the trail, don't ignore the world that can be found around you, even at your feet. Mosses, lichens, and mushrooms grow everywhere, from the trunks of trees to the trail banks, bridges, and rocks along the way. A magnifying glass can bring this world even closer and illuminate the intricacies of its life forms. Take a good look at the trunk of a beech tree, for example. Those mottled areas are not patterns on the gray bark, but lichens growing on its smooth surface.

Can we meet?

Watching for Wildlife

From forest floor to forest canopy, Tsuta is a haven for wildlife. To spot birds, focus on their movement and listen for the source of the birdsong. Be aware of your surroundings at all times. If your senses tell you something is watching you, they are probably right. Often it is the Japanese serow, a cloven-hoofed herbivore that does not run from humans, but usually just stops and stares. Black bears also populate the area.

Narcissus flycatcher (*kibitaki; Ficedula narcissina*)

This flycatcher migrates from Southeast Asia to mate in the spring and early summer. It makes its nest in the upper reaches of hollow trees and in old woodpecker nests. The male is bright yellow from throat to chest, with a black crown. Narcissus flycatchers are relatively easy to spot because of their repeated behavior of flying from the tip of a branch to pick an insect out of the air, then flying back to the same perch. Breeding males have a particularly melodious song.

Eastern crowned warbler (*Sendai mushikui; Phylloscopus coronatus*)

A migrating bird that comes from as far as India, this warbler favors deciduous broadleaf forests in the lower reaches of the mountains. It is small, with a length of 12.5 centimeters, and has a dark-green back and a grayish-white front. It feeds on insects, and though quite difficult to spot, can be located through its loud song.

Eurasian jay
(*kakesu; Garrulus glandarius*)

With blue striped patches on its wings and black patches around the eyes, this jay stands out in the forest. It feeds on insects and the eggs and chicks of other birds, but turns to acorns (which it stores under dead leaves on the ground) as autumn comes. It is particularly vocal in the spring and fall, and is known to be capable of mimicking many other birds, including birds of prey—and, some say, even cats and humans.

Japanese serow (*kamoshika; Capricornis crispus*)

Although its Japanese name includes the word for deer(*shika*), the serow is actually an even-toed bovid, a furry kind of goat-antelope that has been designated a Special National Monument.Though the Japanese serow was once in danger of extinction, its numbers have now stabilized. Less than a meter in height even when fully grown, serows do not run from humans, but hold their ground and stare in silence. If you feel something is watching you in the forest, look around and you may spot one.

Mandarin duck (*oshidori; Aix galericulata*)

Mandarin ducks are fond of forested areas near fresh water, so the swamps of Tsuta are an ideal habitat for them. These waterfowl can be seen in many places, notably the Tsutanuma, Naganuma, Sugenuma, and Hyotannuma swamps. The ducks mate andbreed in the forest, building their nests in hollow tree trunks. The vibrant colors of the male contrast with the somber colors of the female, particularly when the males puff up their chests during courting season. Mandarin ducks feed on plants and seeds such as beech nuts, as well as insects and small fish.

Can I find it?

Majestic Woodlands

Try to distinguish between the two major species of trees and the two varieties of vines that make up much of the Tsuta Forest. The trunk of the beech tree is smooth and colored a light gray, while the bark of the Japanese horse chestnut tree is rougher and darker. The forest was most likely named after the many vines (*tsuta*) that climb the tree trunks to reach sunlight above the forest canopy. The crimson glory vine (*yamabudo*) is black with large leaves and clusters of a purple fruit that is a kind of wild grape. The hardy kiwi vine (*sarunashi*) is a light gray to grayish brown. Its small kiwi fruit, like that of the crimson glory vine, appears in the fall. The bark of both species peels off as the vine grows.

Moonlight mushroom
(*tsukiyotake; Omphalotus japonicus*)

This mountain mushroom appears from early summer through autumn, most often on the trunks of fallen beech trees. It ranges in color from orange to dark or purplish brown, and grows up to 25 centimeters in diameter. Noted for its luminescence, the mushroom glows a slightly green color in the dark—hence its name. Because it resembles other popular mushrooms, it is responsible for more poisoning cases than any other mushroom in Japan.

Kikuzaki-ichige anemone
(*kikuzaki-ichige; Anemone pseudoaltaica*)

This perennial wildflower got its Japanese name from its resemblance to a chrysanthemum (*kiku*). The white to purple blossoms open during the spring, before the leaves of the deciduous forest canopy block the sunlight from reaching the forest floor. This anemone likes damp soil, where it can grow up to 30 centimeters.

Small creatures that tell us the seasons

Ezo-haru cicada
(*ezoharuzemi; Terpnosia nigricosta*)

Yellowish brown with a slightly greenish head and thorax, this small cicada inhabits broadleaf forests, particularly beech forests, in cooler parts of Japan. Unlike the cicadas that emerge later in summer, it appears in the spring between May and June. The sound of Ezo-haru cicadas singing in unison is said to be even louder than birdsong. They stop singing just before rainfall and resume when the weather clears.

Forest green tree frog
(*moriaogaeru; Zhangixalus arboreus*)

Though these frogs live in the forest as adults, they mate on branches that hang over the water, and lay their eggs there in a cluster of foam. After the tadpoles hatch, they emerge from the foam and fall into the water, where they mature before moving into the forest. These white egg clusters are particularly visible on the branches over Hyotannuma swamp.

Let's follow field manners

Do Not Feed the Animals.

Do Not Remove Flora, Fauna, or Rocksfrom the Park.

Keep to Boardwalks and Trails.

Do not campout or make bonfire in the designated area.

Take all garbage home.

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