

An Expanse of Dense Woodland and Animals



The dense woodland of Tokachi-Mitsumata viewed from Mikuni Pass

Dense Woodland Expanding at the Mountain Base

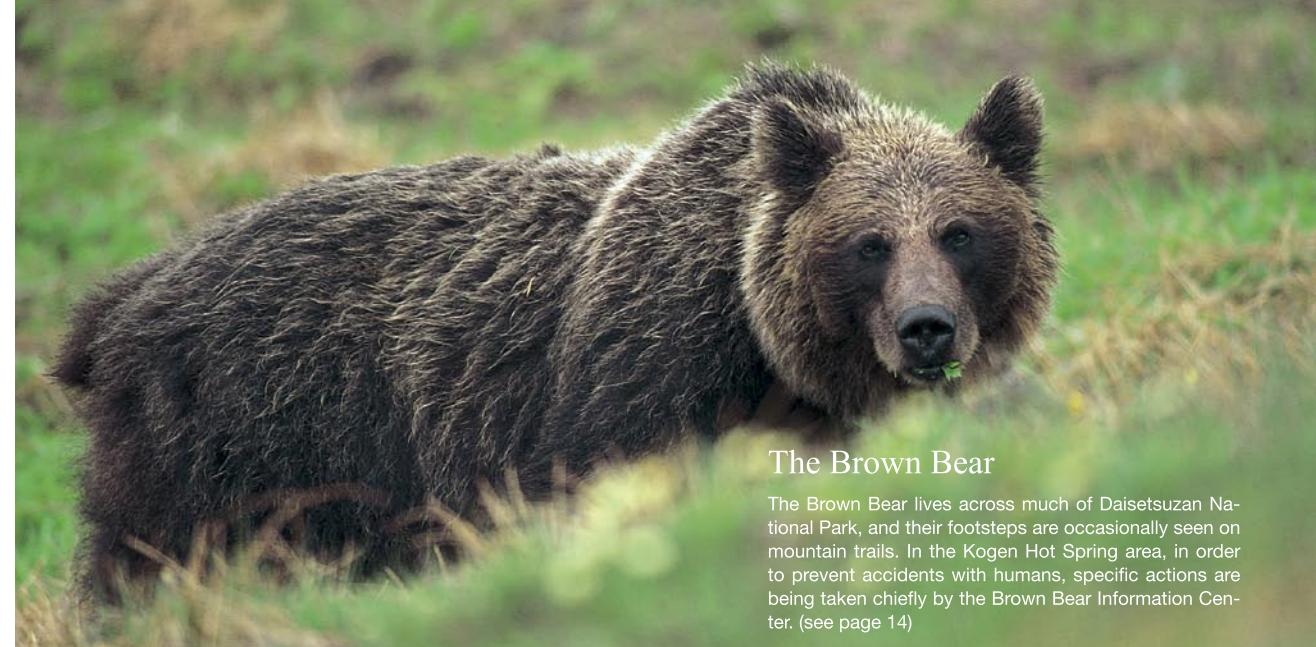
A broad, dense woodland of broadleaf and needleleaf trees expands in Tokachi-Mitsumata basin, which has recently been revealed to be a caldera. It is the deepest forest of the national park. Mammals such as the Brown Bear, Ezo Deer, the Japanese Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes japonica*), Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*), striped squirrels, and the Stoat (*Mustela erminea*), as well as numerous bird species such as the Blakiston's Fish Owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*) and the Black Woodpecker (*Dryocopus martius*) inhabit the forests of Daisetsuzan. The Eurasian Three-toed Woodpecker (*Picoides tridactylus*), one of the rarest birds in Japan, has also been identified in the Daisetsuzan region. Also, it is only in the Higashi Daisetsu region where the breeding of the Tengmalm's Owl (*Aegolius funereus*) has been confirmed.



Japanese Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes japonica*)



Red Squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*)



The Brown Bear

The Brown Bear lives across much of Daisetsuzan National Park, and their footsteps are occasionally seen on mountain trails. In the Kogen Hot Spring area, in order to prevent accidents with humans, specific actions are being taken chiefly by the Brown Bear Information Center. (see page 14)

The Ezo Deer

The Ezo Deer has been increasing in number all over Hokkaido, and in Daisetsuzan region, it is often seen from the road. The increased population has caused damages to agricultural crops, trees, and even to alpine vegetation. There have also been problems such as collisions of cars and Ezo Deer. The national and local governments have been making efforts such as investigating the damages caused by the deers' feeding, alerting visitors and implementing measures to prevent accidents. The Hokkaido government is undertaking the population management program for the Ezo Deer.



The Master of the Primeval Forest



Blakiston's Fish Owl (*Ketupa blakistoni*)

Blakiston's Fish Owl is one of the largest species of owl in the world (body length 70cm) and is distributed in a very small region of Far East Asia. In Japan, they can be found only in Hokkaido.

They establish their territories along rivers and feed mainly on fish. Formerly, they had a larger population and lived across the whole island. They even lived near communities and the Ainu people called the bird "Kotan koro kamui (the guardian deity of the village)" referring to it as the mightiest god who had been sent from above to drive away goblins and protect the village (Kotan). However, in recent years, their population has decreased dramatically due to the logging of large trees with their nest-holes, deterioration of many rivers, and decreased migration of salmon and trout due to dam construction. Now only about 120 birds remain mainly in eastern Hokkaido. In order to protect the species from extinction, the Ministry of the Environment has been working on protection/breeding projects such as the installation of nest-boxes. A few of these birds live in the eastern region of the Daisetsuzan National Park.



Setting up nest boxes



Column

The Fauna of Hokkaido—Closer to that of the Continent

Within Japan, the varieties of animals inhabiting Hokkaido and Honshu differ greatly. For instance, mammals such as the Asiatic Black Bear (*Ursus thibetanus*), Japanese Macaque (*Macaca fuscata*), Japanese Serow (*Capricornis crispus*), and the Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*) do not inhabit Hokkaido, whereas the Brown Bear, Sable (*Martes zibellina*), and striped squirrels do not inhabit Honshu and southward. This is due to the fact that Hokkaido and Honshu were separated early on by the postglacial sea level rise and subsequent isolation of land animals. In contrast, the land that is now Hokkaido remained connected to Sakhalin and Russian Far East until much later, allowing the animals to move around. Thus the animals of Hokkaido share many similarities with animals of these regions. However, there are also animals that are present in Russian Far East and Sakhalin but not in Hokkaido, as well as species native to Japan that are widely distributed from Hokkaido to Kyushu.

Typhoon Toyamaru

The typhoon that struck Hokkaido in September 1954 capsized a ferryboat named Toyamaru that connected Aomori and Hakodate, leaving numerous victims. The typhoon caused unprecedented damage to many forests of Hokkaido, but the damage to the Daisetsuzan region was the severest. It is difficult to trace damage that took place half a century ago, but the number of trees that were knocked down by the wind was so great that the forest composition changed drastically. This type of great disaster may be a part of the successional process that occurs every few hundred years, but the disappearance of the large trees that composed the dark forest resulted in the drying of the forest, and is thought to have affected its fauna as well.

