

The Road to Inscription on the World Heritage List

What is a World Natural Heritage Property?

World Heritage properties are treasures to be passed on to future generations as part of the invaluable heritage of all humankind.

World Heritage properties are inscribed based on the “Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (World Heritage Convention)” and include Natural Heritage, Cultural Heritage and Mixed Natural and Cultural Heritage. Japan has four World Natural Heritage sites: Shiretoko (Hokkaido), Shirakami-Sanchi (Aomori and Akita Prefectures), Yakushima (Kagoshima Prefecture), and Ogasawara Islands (Tokyo).

Efforts for Inscription on the World Heritage List

In 2003, the “Committee on World Natural Heritage Nominated Property (jointly established by the Ministry of the Environment and the Forestry Agency)” selected “Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern Part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island” for nomination for inscription on the World Heritage List. The government of Japan listed the area on its Tentative List in 2016 and submitted the nomination dossier to the UNESCO World Heritage Center in February 2019, with the goal of it becoming Japan’s fifth World Natural Heritage property.

As prerequisites for inscription on the World Heritage List, the property needs to have not only “Outstanding Universal Value” but also “value to be protected and sustained in the future”. Therefore, the following efforts are being made regarding the World Natural Heritage nominated property “Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern Part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island.”

Action 1. Designation and Expansion of Protected Areas

To promote protection measures based on the law, the Ministry of the Environment designated almost the entire area of Iriomote Island as a national park by expanding “Iriomote-Ishigaki National Park” in 2016, as well as by newly designating the northern part of Okinawa Island as “Yambaru National Park” in 2016 and the area including Amami-Oshima Island and Tokunoshima Island as “Amami Gunto National Park” in 2017. Moreover, in 2018, the ministry expanded “Yambaru National Park” by including the returned land of Northern Training Area.

Action 2. Enhanced Conservation and Management

To conserve the outstanding universal value of the nominated property, related administrative agencies, local residents and various bodies are collaboratively implementing projects to control invasive alien species, eliminate or reduce the effects of cats and dogs, prevent illegal collection of rare species and traffic accidents, and establish proper tourism management.



Captured mongoose



Patrol to prevent illegal capture and collection

Source: “Natural History of Ryukyu” (1980, Tsukiji-shokan (Tokyo))
Geographic patterns of Endemism and Speciation in Amphibians and Reptiles of the Ryukyu Archipelago, Japan, with Special Reference to their Paleogeographical Implications (Res. Popul. Ecol. 40 (2), 1998, pp. 189-204.)



Facilities for Information Dissemination and Awareness Raising

Official website

“Nomination of Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern Part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island”

URL : <http://kyushu.env.go.jp/naha/amami-okinawa/index-en.html>



Facilities and offices

The Ministry of the Environment of Japan dispatches rangers for nature conservation to facilities and offices in each of the four areas to provide information on the nominated property and promote awareness raising.

Amami Wildlife Center

Address: 551 Koshinohata, Ongachi, Yamato-son, Oshima-gun, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan
TEL: +81-997-55-8620
HP : <http://kyushu.env.go.jp/okinawa/awcc/>



Tokunoshima Ranger Station

Address: F4, Amagi Town Office, 2691-1 Hetono, Amagi Town, Oshima-gun, Kagoshima Prefecture, Japan
TEL: +81-997-85-2919

Yambaru Wildlife Conservation Center

Address: 263-1 Hiji, Kunigami Village, Kunigami-gun, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan
TEL: +81-980-50-1025
HP : <http://www.ufugi-yambaru.com/>



Iriomote Wildlife Conservation Center

Address: Komi, Taketomi Town, Yeyama-gun, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan
TEL: +81-980-84-7130
HP : <http://iwccc.a1n9.jp/>



Okinawa Amami Nature Conservation Office, Ministry of the Environment, Japan
Naha Daiichi Regional Government Building F1, 1-15-15, Higawa, Naha City, Okinawa Prefecture, Japan 900-0022
TEL +81-98-836-6400 FAX +81-98-836-6401



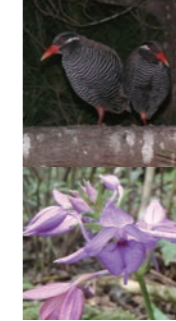
Go for it! Toward the inscription of Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, the northern part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island on the UNESCO World Heritage List

リサイクル適性 (A)
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Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern Part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island

Nominated for a World Natural Heritage property

Government of Japan
Ministry of the Environment
Okinawa Amami Nature Conservation Office



Distinct Climate and Geological History



“Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern Part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island”, which are nominated for inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List, comprise a subtropical area located from 24 to 30 degrees north. Unlike other subtropical areas which are usually desert or dry grassland, this area which benefits from the warm, humid subtropical maritime climate produced by the Kuroshio Sea Current and subtropical high-pressure systems, is blessed with forests.

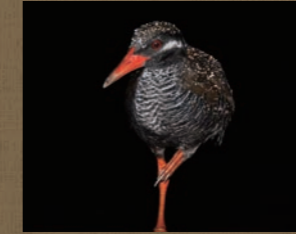
More than 12 million years ago, these islands were part of the Eurasian Continent, but strong tectonic movements and subsequent sea level changes separated them from Eurasia and mainland Japan. After repeated separation from and re-connection with neighboring islands, these islands have become what they are today.

Feel the breath of life Rich forests Islands of rich biodiversity

We're working to have “Amami-Oshima Island, Tokunoshima Island, Northern Part of Okinawa Island, and Iriomote Island” inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2020.

Treasure Trove of Living Creatures

Many living creatures are found here and nowhere else, including “relict endemic species” and “new endemic species”. The former were isolated on these islands from the continent where they had been widely distributed and only survive today in the original form, even after the populations on the continent became extinct. The latter have become endemic, having undergone unique evolution in adaptation to the specific environmental conditions of each island. They are an outstanding model of the process of biological evolution that reflects the geological history.



Okinawa rail
(*Gallirallus okinawae*)



Iriomote cat
(*Prionailurus bengalensis iriomotensis*)



Kuroiwa's ground gecko
(*Goniurosaurus kuroiwaae*)



Amami rabbit
(*Pentalagus furnessi*)



Okinawa ishikawa's frog
(*Odorrana ishikawae*)



Ryukyu long-haired rat
(*Diplathrix legata*)



Representative Areas where Many Rare Species can be Observed

With diverse natural environments such as rich subtropical laurel forests and mangroves, this area provides a habitat for globally unique and important endangered and endemic species, including 95 species listed on the IUCN Red List. Reflecting the importance of this area for biodiversity conservation, as many as 55% of the endangered vascular plant species in Japan inhabit this area, together with 38% of the endangered terrestrial mammals, 60% of the endangered amphibians, and 56% of the endangered insects.



Iriomote Island

Iriomote cat
(*Prionailurus bengalensis iriomotensis*)

Yellow-margined box turtle
(*Cuora flavomarginata*)



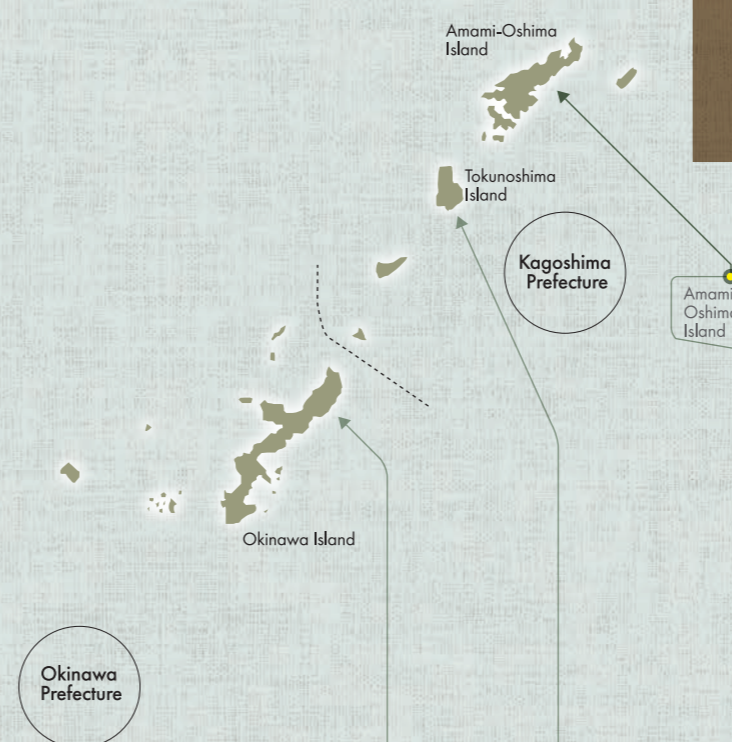
Crested serpent eagle
(*Spilornis cheela perplexus*)

Iriomote Island has mountains, such as Mount Komidake (469 m) and Mount Gozadake (420 m), near-pristine subtropical laurel forests, mangroves, and Japan's largest coral reef (Sekisei Lagoon), and other intact natural environments. In the mountain area, there are many air plants, such as orchids and ferns, because of cloud belts that naturally occur around the island. The island provides habitats to the Iriomote cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis iriomotensis*), Yellow-margined box turtle (*Cuora flavomarginata*) and other animals and plants that are endemic to Yaeyama.



Iriomote Island

Iriomote Island



Amami-Oshima Island

Tokunoshima Island

Kagoshima Prefecture

Amami-Oshima Island

Okinawa Island

Okinawa Prefecture

Northern Part of Okinawa Island

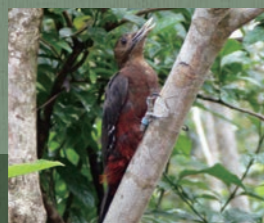
Tokunoshima Island



Rich subtropical laurel forests cover the massif of Mounts Yonahadake (503 m) and Nishimedake (420 m) in the northern part of Okinawa Island (Yambaru). Many endemic species inhabit these forests, such as the flightless Okinawa rail (*Gallirallus okinawae*); Okinawa woodpecker (*Sapheopipo noguchii*), which excavates its nests in tree trunks; the arboreal Ryukyu long-haired rat (*Diplathrix legata*), which inhabits trees and sleeps in tree hollows; and the Yambaru long-armed scarab beetle (*Cheirotonus jambar*), which spends most of its life in tree cavities.



Yambaru long-armed scarab beetle
(*Cheirotonus jambar*)



Okinawa woodpecker
(*Sapheopipo noguchii*)



Nami's frog
(*Limnonectes namiyei*)



Okinawa Sekkoku orchid
(*Dendrobium okinawense*)

Northern Part of Okinawa Island



Tokunoshima Island

With the mountain massif covered by a rich subtropical laurel forest spreading from Mount Amagidake (533 m) in the north and Mount Inokawadake (645 m) in the center to Mount Inutadake (417 m) in the south, Tokunoshima Island serves as habitat for various relict endemic species including the Amami rabbit (*Pentalagus furnessi*), Banded ground gecko (*Goniurosaurus splendens*) and Tokunoshima spiny rat (*Tokudaia tokunoshimensis*).

Amami-Oshima Island



Amami jay (*Garrulus lidthi*)



Amami spiny rat
(*Tokudaia osimensis*)



Otton frog
(*Babina subaspera*)

In the central and southern parts of Amami-Oshima Island, rich subtropical laurel forests extend from Mount Yuwandake (694 m), Mount Yuidake (484 m) and other mountains to the ocean. These forests serve as habitat for various relict endemic species such as the Amami rabbit (*Pentalagus furnessi*), Amami spiny rat (*Tokudaia osimensis*), Amami jay (*Garrulus lidthi*), and Otton frog (*Babina subaspera*), along with rare species such as the Amami woodcock (*Scalopax mira*). The Ryukyu ayu-fish (*Plecoglossus altivelis ryukyensis*) lives in the Yakuguchi, Kawouchi and other rivers.



Amami rabbit
(*Pentalagus furnessi*)



Banded ground gecko
(*Goniurosaurus splendens*)