

Shirakoma Pond: 'Natural Planetarium' and Moss-Covered Forest

長野県・北八ヶ岳の原生林に囲まれた白駒の池には、満天の星が広がる「天然のプラネタリウム」と、苔に覆われた神秘的な森があります。日常を離れ、こうした豊かな自然の中で過ごす時間は、心を癒やしてくれるだけでなく、自然を守ることの大切さにも気づかせてくれるかもしれません。あなたは、美しい自然を楽しみながら未来へ残していくために、私たちに何ができると思いますか。



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

At an elevation of 2,115 meters (6934 ft), Shirakoma Pond in Nagano Prefecture's Northern Yatsugatake Volcanic Group lies amid a pristine coniferous forest of northern Japanese hemlock and Veitch's fir.

Largely unaffected by city lights, the pond is known as one of Japan's premier stargazing spots.

After 10 PM one July night, the clouds that had covered the sky gradually began to clear. A camera set up by the lakeshore captured the Milky Way rising clearly against a night sky filled with countless stars.

"When the wind dies down, the stars are reflected on the still surface of the water, making it look like a natural planetarium," said Morishige Tatsuno, executive director of Shirakoma-so, a mountain [lodge](#) on the lakeshore who also serves as a stargazing guide.

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1. Article

"The sky feels incredibly expansive here, and there's a good chance of seeing shooting stars."

He recalled once seeing an especially bright fireball from a boat on the pond, describing it as a breathtaking sight.

The surrounding forest is home to 519 [species](#) of moss. Observing them, one is reminded of the important role moss has played in the history of life on Earth.

Some 460 million years ago, the ancestors of moss evolved from algae and made the [transition](#) from sea to land. Through photosynthesis, they helped increase oxygen levels in the [atmosphere](#), enrich the soil, and lay the [foundation](#) for diverse forms of life to thrive.

"Humans are able to live on land today thanks to moss. Some people think it's cute, but I see it as something to be respected," said Takehiro Yamaura, the third-generation owner of Seitai-so, another mountain lodge on the lakeshore. He is also a member of the Bryological Society of Japan.

"I hope people will learn about the beauty of moss and appreciate the importance of nature," he added.

Yamaura organizes his own events and also leads moss observation walks through an association formed by nearby mountain lodges and the local forestry cooperative. Through these activities, he works to share the beauty of the moss forest with visitors.

He is also involved in maintaining the trails so that people can safely explore the forest without damaging tree roots or moss.

The wooden boardwalk around Shirakoma Pond was begun about 30 years ago by Yamaura's father, Kiyoshi, now 72, who previously owned Seitai-so. He eventually completed the boardwalk.

"How can we minimize our impact on nature and avoid damaging it? As people who have entered the natural world, it is our responsibility to protect it by living in harmony with nature," Kiyoshi said.

1. Article



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[Japan Forward](#)

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2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. lodge 山小屋

We stayed at a small mountain lodge during our hiking trip.

2. species 種

Scientists discovered several new species of butterflies in the rainforest nearby.

3. transition 移行

The company is going through a transition to a new computer system.

4. atmosphere 大気

The main part of our atmosphere is a thin layer of nitrogen and oxygen about thirty kilometers thick.

5. foundation 基盤

Good communication is the foundation of a successful business team.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. Why is Shirakoma Pond a popular place for stargazing?
2. What did moss help increase in the atmosphere millions of years ago?
3. Why was the wooden boardwalk built around Shirakoma Pond?
4. What can visitors do to enjoy a natural area without damaging it?
5. What natural place in your area would you recommend to someone who wants to relax?

4. 天然のプラネタリウムと苔むした癒やしの森 北八ヶ岳の原生林に 囲まれた神秘的白駒の池

午後10時を過ぎ、空を覆っていた雲が徐々に消え始めた。湖畔にセットしていたカメラで撮影すると、無数の星が輝く夜空に立ち昇る天の川がくっきりと浮かび上がった。

標高2115メートル。長野県の北八ヶ岳でコメツガやシラビソなどの針葉樹林に抱かれた「白駒（しらこま）の池」は、街明かりの影響を受けにくく、屈指の星空観察スポットとして知られる。

湖畔に建つ山小屋「白駒荘」の専務で星空のガイドを務める辰野守茂さん（56）は「凧になると、波のない水面に星が映り込んで天然のプラネタリウムのようになる。空が広く、流れ星も高確率で見ることができる」。池に漕ぎ出したボート上からひとときわ明るい火球（かきゅう）をみたことがあるといい、それは息をのむような光景だったという。

周辺は、ムツデチョウチンゴケやイワダレゴケなど519種の苔が自生する「癒やしの森」として人気だ。約4億6000万年前、苔の祖先は藻（そう）類から進化して海から陸へ進出し、光合成によって空気中の酸素を増やした。豊かな土壌を育み、多様な生物が生息するための礎を築いた。

「今、人間が陸地で生活できるのも苔のおかげ。かわいいという人もいるが、自分の中では尊敬する存在だ」と話すのは、湖畔にたたずむもう1軒の山小屋「青苔（せいたい）荘」の3代目主人で、日本蘚苔（せんたい）類学会の会員でもある山浦雄大（たけひろ）さん（35）。「苔の魅力を知り、自然の大切さを感じてほしい」。

自らイベントを企画するほか近隣の山小屋と地元森林組合でつくる「北八ヶ岳苔の会」で観察会を開催し、苔の森を発信している。木の根や苔を傷つけず安全に森を散策できるよう、登山道の整備にも取り組む。

白駒の池を周回する木道は青苔荘の先代、山浦清さん（72）が30年ほど前につくり始め、完成したという。「自然にダメージを与えないよう、いかに負荷を抑えるか。自然と共生して守るのは、自然界に入ってしまった人間の責任だね」

白駒の池を後にしてからも、清さんの言葉が胸にこだましている。

出典：天然のプラネタリウムと苔むした癒やしの森 北八ヶ岳の原生林に囲まれた神秘的白駒の池
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