



Let's Explore! Senkaku Islands

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Let's Explore!

Senkaku Islands

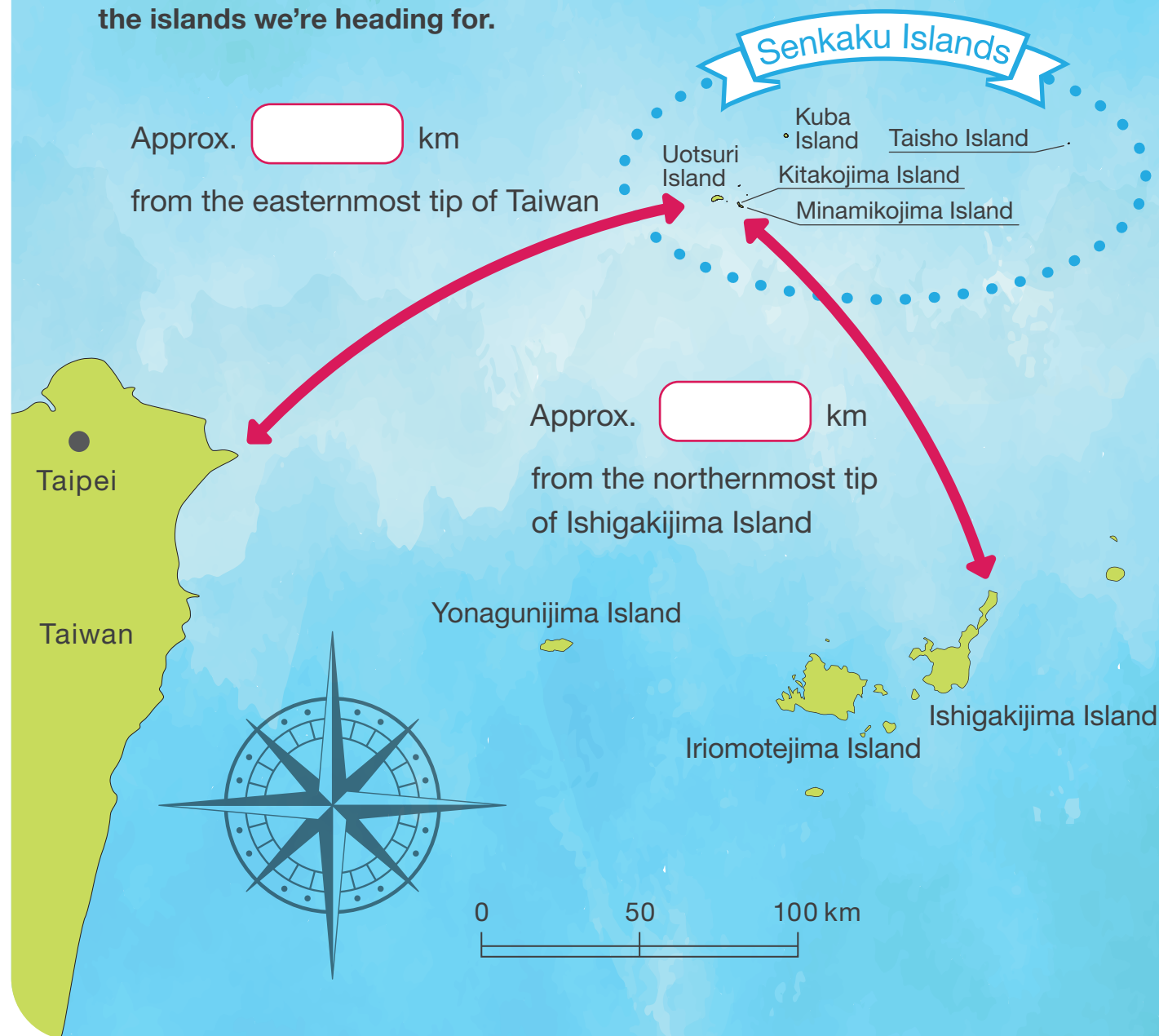


Let's take a trip to the islands together!

The Senkaku Islands' albatross mascot, Alba-chan

Where are the Senkaku Islands?

The Senkaku Islands are situated at the extreme western edge of Japanese territory, in the sea north of the Yaeyama Islands. Municipally, the islands are known as Tonoshiro Senkaku, part of the city of Ishigaki. That's right! This is Ishigaki City! Now, first, let's check the coordinates of the islands we're heading for.



Approx. km

from the easternmost tip of Taiwan

Approx. km

from the northernmost tip of Ishigakijima Island

Hints

How far are the Senkaku Islands from Ishigakijima Island? They seem closer than the main island of Okinawa!

(1) From its northern tip (Hirakubosaki Lighthouse) to its southern tip (Painuhama-cho), Ishigakijima Island measures 35 km as the crow flies.

(2) You can also use the Internet to find out.



Agunijima Island

Kumejima Island

Tokashikijima Island

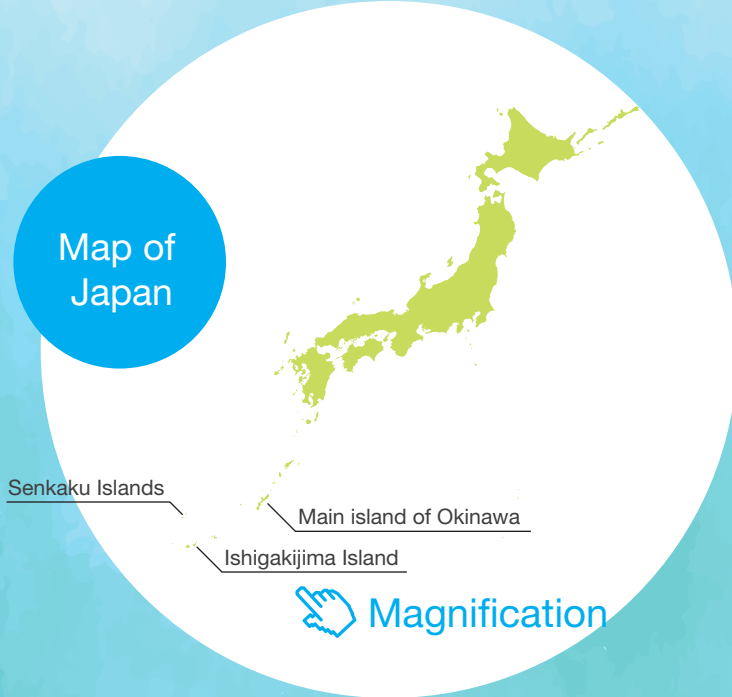
Main island of Okinawa

Naha

Miyakojima Island

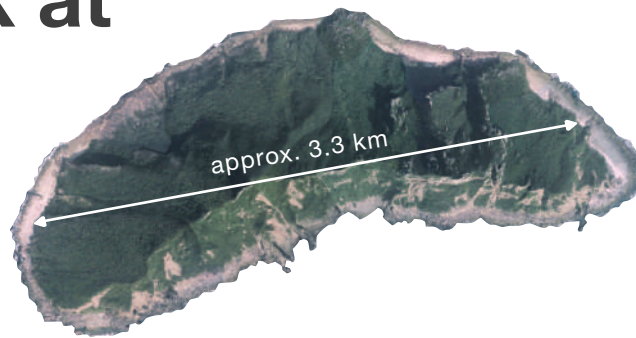
Yonagunijima Island

Iriomotejima Island
Ishigakijima Island



Let's take a closer look at the Senkaku Islands!

Whether dotted with verdant mountains and valleys, perfectly round like a *mochi* rice cake, or covered in rugged and rocky terrain, these islands are each unique. Let's take a closer look!



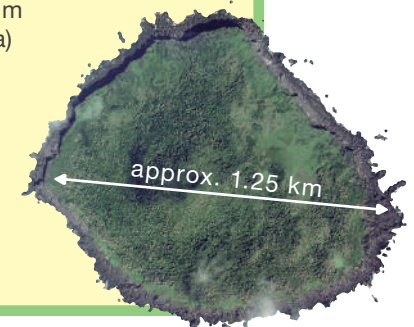
Kuba Island

A volcanic island with several craters in its central area. Also known as *Kobi-sho*.

2393 Tonoshiro-Senkaku, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa
Land area: 0.91 km²
Position: 25°55' N, 123°40' E
Elevation: 117 m (Chitose-yama)



Photo credit: Kyodo News



Taisho Island

This long, narrow, rocky island lies along an east-west axis. Also known as *Sekibi-sho*.

2394 Tonoshiro-Senkaku, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa
Land area: 0.06 km²
Position: 25°55' N, 124°33' E
Elevation: 75 m



Photo credit: Kyodo News

Uotsuri Island

This is the largest island of the group. The southern part of the island has steep cliffs. There are also small rivers and a variety of vegetation, including the fountain palm (known locally as *kuba*) and the fragrant screw-pine (*adan*).

2392 Tonoshiro-Senkaku, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa
Land area: 3.81 km²
Position: 25°44' N, 123°28' E
Elevation: 362 m (Narahara-dake)



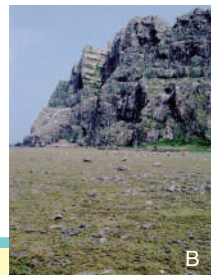
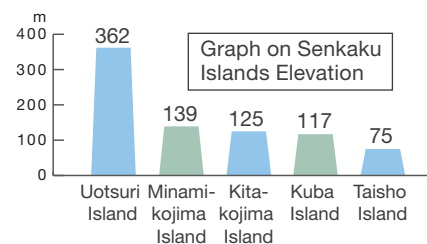
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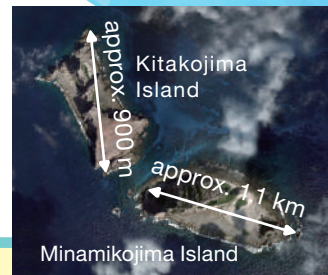
A



C



B



B



B

Tobise Island

Land area: 0.002 km²
Position: 25°44' N, 123°30' E
Elevation: 2 m



Minamikoijima Island

This island features two sharp, rocky summits, one in the east at about 90 meters and another in the west at about 140 meters, separated by a flat expanse of land.

2390 Tonoshiro-Senkaku, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa
Land area: 0.40 km²
Position: 25°43' N, 123°33' E
Elevation: 139 m



Uotsuri Island

Kitakoijima Island

Minamikoijima Island

Photo credit: Kyodo News

Kitakoijima Island

The northern section of this island is dotted with tall, sharp rocks. The southern section is a triangular plateau with an elevation of 110 meters where seabirds raise their young.

2391 Tonoshiro-Senkaku, Ishigaki-shi, Okinawa
Land area: 0.31 km²
Position: 25°43' N, 123°32' E
Elevation: 125 m

Okinokitaiwa Island

Land area: 0.03 km²
Position: 25°46' N, 123°32' E
Elevation: 28 m



Okinominamiwa Island

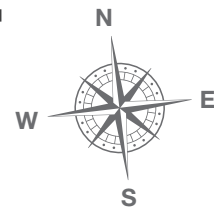
Land area: 0.01 km²
Position: 25°45' N, 123°34' E
Elevation: 10 m



Note: Land area, coordinates (latitude and longitude), and elevation are based on data from the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan. Photo credits: A) Yoshihiko Yamada, B) Yoshima Niuro, C) Tokyo Prefecture; all aerial photos courtesy of the Geospatial Information Authority of Japan

Let's zoom in even closer! Uotsuri Island

The largest island in the Senkaku group, Uotsuri is a mountainous island with fresh water and a now uninhabited village. The lush forests and grassy expanses that cover the island are home to plants and animals found nowhere else in the world. Want to find out just what kind of island this is? Let's explore!



The waters around the Senkaku Islands are excellent fishing grounds. Their secret lies in the topography of the seabed and the ocean currents.

For more details, see page 13



Marlin spearfishing boat
Date of photo: 1952



The southern cliff face seen from near the island's summit (elevation 362 m).

Environment



The north side of the island is a gentle slope.

The island is home to a variety of plants commonly found in warmer regions, some of which are endangered.

For more details, see pages 16-17

Highest point
Narahara-dake
Elevation: 362 m

Landing

A single pair of goats brought to the island in 1978 have since multiplied and have become a menace to the environment.



Byobu-dake
Elevation: 321 m



The south side of the island is a steep cliff.



There are several small streams running on the island.

Flora and fauna

The island is surrounded by craggy boulders.



The Senkaku Islands are a paradise for seabirds, and represent a globally important seabird sanctuary.

For more details, see pages 14-15



History

Although it is uninhabited now, Uotsuri Island was once home to a village of more than 200 people. On the northwest of the island is a landing built by its former inhabitants.



Ishigaki City has set up markers to show that the Senkaku Islands are one of the city's municipal administrative districts.

For more details, see page 19



For more details, see page 09

Photo credits: A) Yoshihiko Yamada, B) Yoshima Niro, C) Tokyo Prefecture, D) Haruo Ogi, E) Hideo Arakaki, F) Kouichi Yamamoto

Image of Uotsuri Island Google Earth/©2022 Maxar Technologies Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO

The Chronicle of the Senkaku Islands

The Senkaku Islands were once uninhabited islands that did not belong to any country. In the Meiji period, Japan officially incorporated the islands as Japanese territory and the islands were settled. Today, the islands are once again uninhabited, but they remain a part of Japan's territory. Let's take a look at the history of these islands.



Photo credit: Yoshihiko Yamada

1 Before Officially Becoming Japanese Territory

Signposts on the Sea

The Senkaku Islands are depicted on an old scroll from the Ryukyu Kingdom describing the route between Naha and the port of Fuzhou, China. Fuzhou, a major port city and once the capital of ancient China, was an important trading point for the Ryukyu Kingdom. The Senkaku Islands are located between Fuzhou and Naha in what is now Okinawa. In the days when ships were navigated solely by wind and muscle power, the unique shapes of these islands rising from the open ocean would have been perfect landmarks.

Tobin koukaizu (year of production unknown). An old nautical chart depicting the unique shapes of the islands of Uotsuri, Kuba, and Taisho.



Repository: Okinawa Prefectural Museum and Art Museum

The Senkaku Islands Become Part of Okinawa Prefecture

About 150 years ago, with advances in navigation technology, many foreign vessels began to arrive in the vicinity of Japan. In addition, with more and more people setting out from Yaeyama to fish around the Senkaku Islands, there was an increasing need to manage the islands.

Therefore, a new field survey was conducted, and it was found that the Senkaku Islands did not belong to any country, including China (then ruled by the Qing Dynasty). The government officially declared the Senkaku Islands to be part of Okinawa Prefecture and a territory of Japan in 1895.

The Chinese characters used to write "Senkaku" mean "pointed" and "towering."

The name "Senkaku" was coined by Hisashi Kuroiwa, a teacher at Okinawa Prefecture Normal School.



2 Development of the Senkaku Islands

In Search of the Plumage of the Short-Tailed Albatross

The following year, Okinawa Prefecture granted Tatsushiro Koga, a merchant from Fukuoka Prefecture, permission to develop the four islands of Uotsuri, Kuba, Kitakojima, and Minamikojima. Koga started an enterprise collecting short-tailed albatross feathers on Kuba Island. These feathers commanded a very high price and were exported overseas by traders from Yokohama and Kobe.

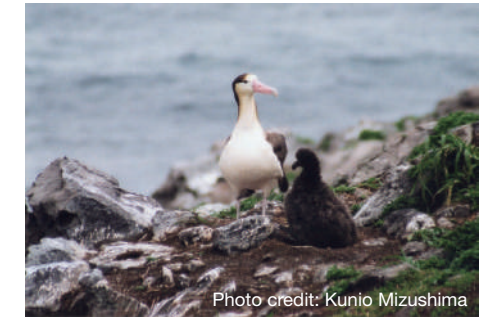


Photo credit: Kunio Mizushima

Short-tailed albatross parent and offspring. The black-feathered bird on the right is the younger bird.

The settlement built on Kuba Island, with a row of thatched huts and a large Japanese flag at full mast.



Repository: National Archives of Japan
Date of photo: 1900

Establishment of a Village on Uotsuri Island

Settlement of the island seemed to be going well, but the short-tailed albatross population soon declined dramatically due to overexploitation. Koga invited experts to conduct a survey, and decided to limit the albatross hunt and move the base of the settlement from Kuba to Uotsuri, where drinking water was more readily available. The settlers cleared fields and built a landing, as well as stone walls to protect the houses from the powerful winds. Next, Koga built a factory to produce dried bonito. At the time, skipjack (arctic bonito) fishing and dried bonito production were booming in Yaeyama, and the area around the Senkaku Islands proved to be an ideal fishing ground. The dried bonito produced in the Senkaku Islands was very popular and became a hot seller. In 1902, Okinawa Prefecture incorporated the four islands of Uotsuri, Kuba, Kitakojima, and Minamikojima as part of the village of Tonoshiro, Ohama Magiri, Yaeyama County. In 1920, Taisho Island also became a part of Tonoshiro.



The landing on Uotsuri, created by blasting a rocky beach with dynamite.

Date of photo: circa 1908

Layout of the buildings for the enterprise on Uotsuri Island (circa 1907, drawn by Tatsushiro Koga)

Source: *Kikan okinawa* (Okinawa quarterly), no. 63 (1972)



Panoramic view of the dried bonito factory on Uotsuri Island

Repository: National Archives of Japan
Date of photo: 1908



Complete map of Tonoshiro Village, Ohama Magiri, Yaeyama County / "Land consolidation map: The Senkaku Islands" (1902)

Image courtesy of: History Editorial Department, Board of Education, Ishigaki City

Islands Bustling with Enterprise

Meanwhile, the islands of Minamikojima and Kitakojima were home to many seabirds such as the sooty tern. Koga began producing stuffed seabirds on Minamikojima. The village he founded grew to 248 inhabitants in 99 households, but the population rapidly declined in the Taisho period (1912–1926). There are various speculations as to why—perhaps the depletion of bird and fish stocks, a lack of profits, or maybe severe damage from typhoons—but the actual reason for the decline remains unclear.



Small huts on Minamikojima Island
Repository: National Archives of Japan (photo taken in 1900)



Waheyama Office, Uotsuri Island
Date of photo: circa 1908



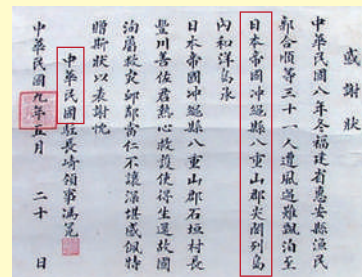
Waheyama Office, Uotsuri Island
Repository: National Archives of Japan (photo taken in 1908)



Countless seabirds flying above Kitakojima Island
Repository: National Archives of Japan (photo taken in 1900)

Letter of appreciation from China

In 1919, a group of 31 fishermen from Fujian Province in China (then known as the Republic of China) were shipwrecked. After a harrowing ordeal, they washed ashore on Uotsuri Island, where they were promptly rescued by the islanders and taken to Ishigakijima Island to be cared for. The following year, as a token of gratitude, a letter of appreciation was sent to the mayor of Ishigaki Village (now Ishigaki City). The letter included the words “the Senkaku Islands, Yaeyama County, Okinawa Prefecture, Empire of Japan,” indicating that China considered the Senkaku Islands to be Japanese territory at that time.



Repository: Ishigaki City Yaeyama Museum

3 Senkaku Islands and the Pacific War

Fleeing the War for Taiwan

Between 1937 and 1945, Japan was at war with China and the United States, among others (the Second Sino-Japanese War and the Pacific Theater of World War II). As the war intensified, urban residents—especially women and children—began to evacuate to the countryside. One of the destinations for evacuees from Ishigakijima Island was Taiwan, which was then under Japanese control, and at the end of June 1945, two ships, the *Yufuku Maru* and the *Isshin Maru*, left Ishigaki Port for Taiwan carrying about 180 people.



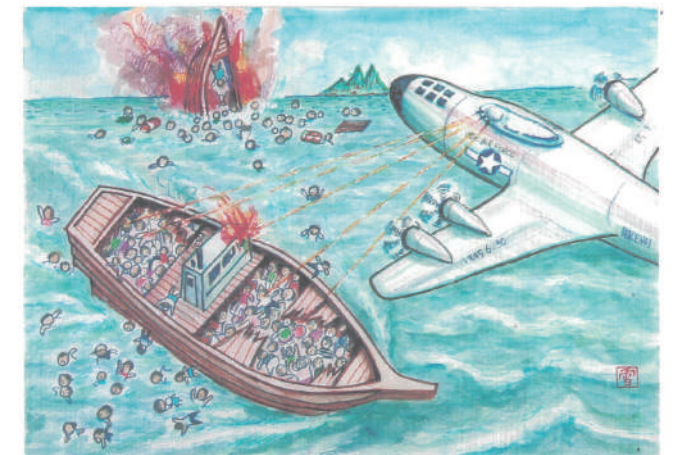
The *Yufuku Maru* and the *Isshin Maru* photographed from an American military plane.
Repository: National Archives and Records Administration

Repository: National Archives and Records Administration

Many Victims

The ships took a roundabout course that took them through an area near the Senkaku Islands, where they were spotted by a U.S. military plane. One ship was bombed, sent it to the bottom of the sea. The other ship was also badly damaged, but managed to reach Uotsuri Island. However, there was not enough food for the more than 100 castaways to survive on the island, which was uninhabited even then. It was not long before people began to die. Building a small boat (known as a *sabani*) with salvage from the wrecked ship, a few people decided to set out for Ishigakijima Island to seek help. Struggling against the stormy seas, they finally reached Ishigakijima Island on the day before the end of the war.

It is still not known exactly how many of the about 180 people who left for Taiwan died (this tragedy is known as the Senkaku Islands Wartime Shipwreck Incident).



An illustration of the attack on the ship drawn by a passenger on the *Yufuku Maru* (picture by Yukihiro Miyara, who was six years old at the time of the incident).

The Senkaku Islands Under U.S. Occupation

After the war ended, Okinawa Prefecture, including the Senkaku Islands, continued to be occupied by the United States. Numerous bases and training grounds were built in Okinawa, and Kuba Island in the Senkaku Islands became a bombing range.

In 1972, Okinawa Prefecture reverted to Japan along with the Senkaku Islands. Like other bases in the prefecture, it was decided that the islands of Kuba and Taisho would continue to be used by the U.S. military as training grounds.



A memorial monument erected in honor of the victims who died in the incident (Arakawa, Ishigaki City).



Memorial monument on Uotsuri Island
The photo shows Kiko Ishigaki, at that time the mayor of Ishigaki City.
Photo credit: Hoji Takamine (1969)

4 Return to Japan

Coming Back to Peaceful and Prosperous Seas

After the war, fishing and scientific research activities resumed in and around the Senkaku Islands.

In the late 1960s, Taiwanese fishing boats began to visit the Senkaku Islands, and the Ryukyu Islands government, in consultation with the U.S., decided to interdict them by erecting signs warning them against trespassing into territorial waters and markers indicating that the islands were part of Ishigaki City.



Installation of warning signs (1970)
Repository: Okinawa Prefectural Archives

A Sudden Territorial Claim

Around this time, the Senkaku Islands attracted international attention when the United Nations announced the results of a study that suggested the possibility of extracting oil from the East China Sea. And it was from that point on that China and Taiwan began to claim the Senkaku Islands as their own territory!



A marker installed by Ishigaki City in 1969. The island's name is written on the front and its civic number on the back.

Repository: Okinawa Prefectural Archives



Japan Coast Guard patrol boats on guard
From left to right: Coast Guard patrol vessel, Chinese government vessel, and Coast Guard patrol vessel
Back: Uotsuri Island

Tension Mounts in the Seas around the Senkaku Islands

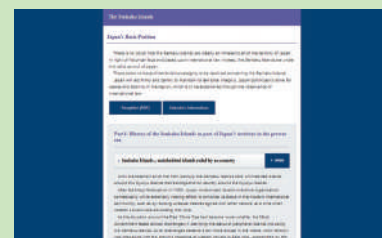
In 2008, Chinese government ships entered Japan's territorial waters for the first time, and in 2010, a Chinese fishing boat that was fishing in Japan's territorial waters was reported to have rammed Japan Coast Guard patrol boats that asked them to leave the area. In recent years, Chinese government vessels have been approaching the area around the Senkaku Islands on an almost daily basis, occasionally straying into Japan's territorial waters.

Want to know more?
Visit this website:

Office of Policy Planning and Coordination on Territory and Sovereignty,
Cabinet Secretariat: Senkaku Islands

https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/ryodo_eg/taiou/index.html#senkaku

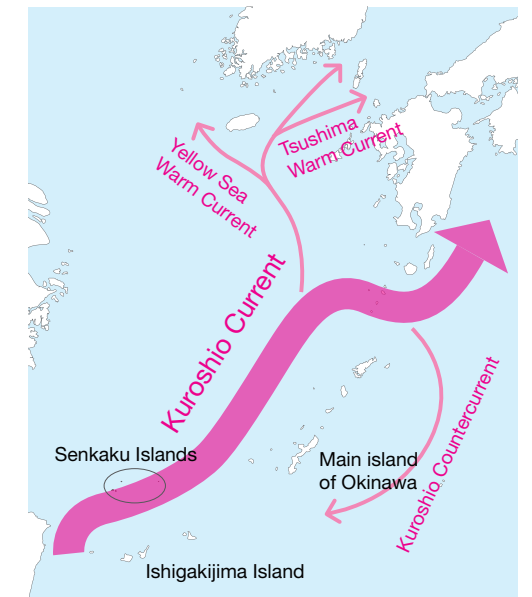
You can peruse online materials explaining the history of the Senkaku Islands. They may be a little difficult for elementary or junior high school students, but everyone will be able to deepen their understanding by looking through the various documents and photos.



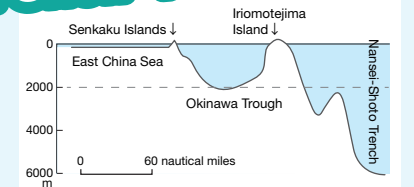
The Sea and Marine Resources around the Senkaku Islands

The area around the Senkaku Islands has long been known as a fishing ground for bonito, tuna, marlin, and snapper, among many others. The secret of this bounty has to do with the ocean floor. Now, let's dive beneath the sea!

Located on the edge of a continental shelf that extends from Eurasia, the Senkaku Islands are in the path of a warm ocean current from the south (the Kuroshio). The continental shelf is filled with abundant nutrients from terrestrial rivers. These nutrients are heavy and settle to the bottom of the ocean, but when they encounter the warm ocean water of the Kuroshio Current, they are swept up, creating ideal conditions for phytoplankton to grow. Zooplankton come to feed on the phytoplankton, and fish congregate to eat the zooplankton, creating an excellent fishing ground.



What is the "Continental Shelf"?



The continental shelf is an area of water up to 200 meters deep that surrounds the mainland. It is said to have been formed by sediments flowing from the continent, or by the subsidence of land that was once part of the mainland during the Ice Age.

In addition to its importance as a rich fishing ground, the area has recently been receiving greater attention for its potential oil, natural gas, minerals, and other resources that may lie beneath the ocean floor.

As we saw on page 12, a UN report was published in 1969 that said oil could be extracted from the East China Sea. After that, China and Taiwan suddenly began claiming the Senkaku Islands as their own territory.



Source: ETOPO1 NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) National Centers for Environmental Information

Fish Species around the Senkaku Islands

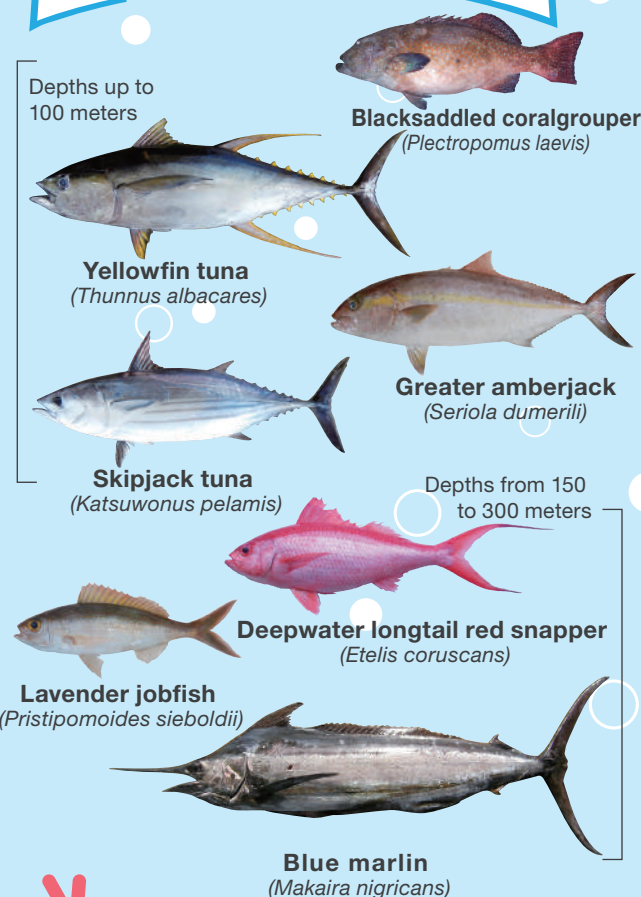
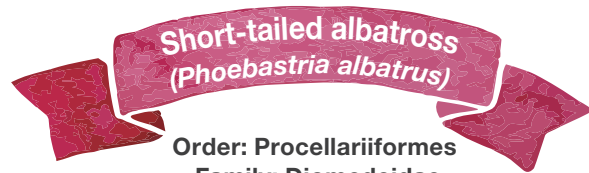


Photo credit: Japan Fisheries Research and Education Agency

Rare Animal Species Living on the Senkaku Islands

The Senkaku Islands are a paradise for seabirds, and have been designated an IBA* by BirdLife International, a global bird conservation network. Because of their isolation from other islands, some species are “endemic,” meaning that they have evolved here on their own.

*Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs) are a joint program implemented by BirdLife International, an international bird conservation network, and its member organizations in more than 100 countries around the world. In Japan, the Wild Bird Society of Japan is responsible for the selection and conservation of IBAs.



Short-tailed albatross
(*Phoebastria albatrus*)

Order: Procellariiformes
Family: Diomedidae
Special Natural Treasure

Endangered Class II (VU) Endangered Class II (VU)

These large migratory birds measure more than two meters with their wings spread. Spending the summer months in the northern seas, they migrate south to the waters around Japan in the winter to raise their young on the islands. Recent studies have shown that the short-tailed albatrosses of the Izu and Senkaku Islands are likely to be different species. The researchers suggest that the name “Senkaku short-tailed albatross” should be used to distinguish those that frequent the Senkaku Islands.



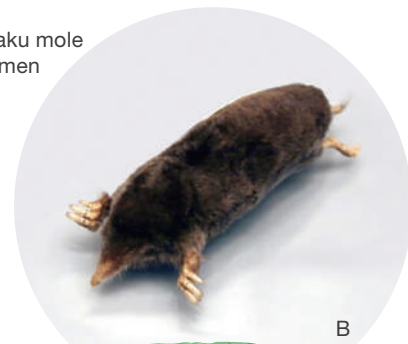
A creature that can only be found in a specific limited area is called an “endemic species”!

A short-tailed albatross chick



Short-tailed albatrosses on Minamikojima Island

Senkaku mole specimen



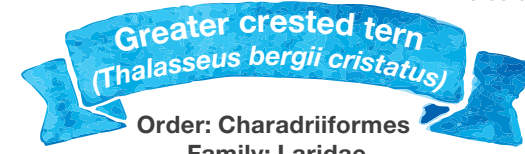
Senkaku mole
(*Mogera uchidai*)

Order: Eulipotyphla
Family: Talpidae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

Endemic species

Only one female of this very rare species of mole has ever been collected, in a grassland near the shore of Uotsuri Island in 1979. It is smaller than other moles and has fewer teeth.



Greater crested tern
(*Thalasseus bergii cristatus*)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Laridae

Endangered Class II (VU) Endangered Class II (VU)

Measuring around 45 cm in length with a wingspan of between 100 and 130 cm, these large birds are found in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean and western Pacific Ocean. In Japan, the species has been observed on Kitakojima Island in the Senkaku Islands and Nishinoshima Island in the Ogasawara Islands.

Eggs of the greater crested tern



Sooty tern
(*Sterna fuscata nubilosa*)

Order: Charadriiformes
Family: Laridae

Near Threatened (NT)

These birds measure about 45 cm in length and have a wingspan of around 94 cm. In the past, their eggs were collected in large quantities for food. This caused their numbers to decline, but the population is now recovering.



Brown booby
(*Sula leucogaster plotus*)

Order: Suliformes
Family: Sulidae
Near Threatened (NT)

Measuring about 70 cm in length with a wingspan of around 140 cm, these birds search for food in the water as they fly, then dive into the sea when they spy a fish. In Japanese, they are called *katsuodori* or “bonito birds,” a name derived from the fact that fishermen used them to find schools of fish.



A brown booby brooding an egg



A brown booby chick

What do we mean by “endangered”?

When a species completely disappears from the earth, we say that it has gone extinct. In Japan, the Ministry of the Environment and prefectural governments list endangered species in order to protect wildlife that are in danger of extinction. The list is known as the Japanese Red List, and ranks species according to the degree to which they are threatened with extinction.

Rank	Status
Endangered Class IA (Critically Endangered [CR])	At extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the very near future
Endangered Class IB (Endangered [EN])	Not as endangered as CR, but at high risk of extinction in the wild in the near future
Endangered Class II (Vulnerable [VU])	Species at heightened risk of extinction
Near Threatened (NT)	Species at low risk of extinction at this time, but may move to endangered status if habitat conditions change

*The Red List is reviewed periodically, since wildlife habitat conditions are constantly changing. This pamphlet uses the following data. The same is true of the plants on the next page.

Ministry of the Environment Red List 2020
Threatened Wildlife in Okinawa, Third Edition (Animals): Red Data Okinawa (2017)
Threatened Wildlife in Okinawa, Third Edition (Fungi and Plants): Red Data Okinawa (2018)



A Ryukyu postage stamp issued in 1972, just before the Ryukyu Islands were returned to Japan, features Minamikojima Island and Senkaku short-tailed albatrosses. You can see the actual stamp at the Senkaku Islands Information Center of Ishigaki City.

The Endangered Short-Tailed Albatross

The Japanese name for the short-tailed albatross is *ahodori* (“idiot-bird”), a reference to its relative lack of concern for humans and its leisurely way of moving on the ground, which makes it easy to catch. About 150 years ago, at least several hundred thousand albatrosses inhabited the far-flung islands of the western North Pacific, but today there are only three confirmed breeding sites: Torishima Island in the Izu Islands, the Midway Atoll off Hawaii, and the Senkaku Islands. Short-tailed albatrosses lay only one egg per year, and the youngest they are able to lay eggs is at five years old, with an average breeding age of seven. Once an albatross population declines, it takes a very long time to recover.

For a time, the Senkaku short-tailed albatross was feared to be extinct, but it is now estimated that there are 250 to 350 short-tailed albatrosses that frequent the islands of Minamikojima and Kitakojima.



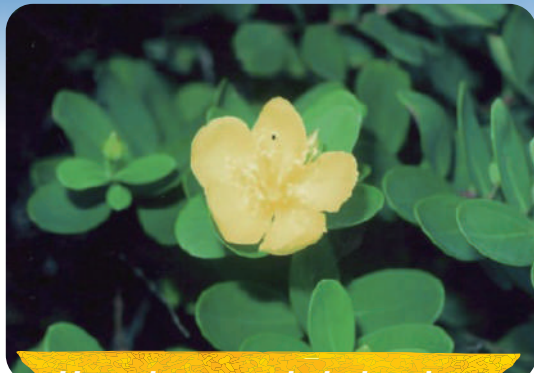
Short-tailed albatrosses on Minamikojima Island



A short-tailed albatross chick

Rare Plants Abound!

More than 430 species of plants have been identified in the Senkaku Islands, including five species that are endemic and more than fifty that are endangered. Uotsuri Island, in particular, with its mountains and fresh water, is a treasure trove of diverse and unique flora.



Hypericum senkakuinsulare

Family: Guttiferae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

An evergreen shrub that grows up to 60 cm tall, with flowers about 4 cm in diameter, this species of hypericum is endemic to Uotsuri Island, where it grows in a very small enclosure near the windswept summit of Uotsuri's rocky peaks.



Phododendron simsii Planch var. *tawadae* (Ohwi) Hatsumima

Family: Ericaceae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

An evergreen shrub growing up to 1 m tall, it produces two pale reddish-purple flowers 2–3 cm in diameter at the tips of its branches from March to May. It is endemic to Uotsuri Island, where it grows on the rocks near the island's summit.

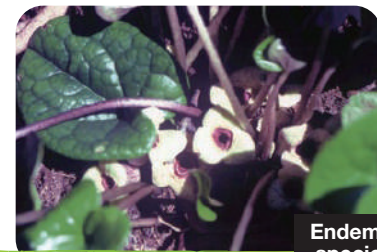


Limaonium senkakuense

Family: Plumbaginaceae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

A perennial herb that grows amidst the rocks along the coast, this plant has 25–50 cm long stems that branch out at the ends and bear flowers. It is endemic to Uotsuri Island, but its native habitat is limited and it is threatened with extinction due to overgrazing by goats.



Asarum senkakuinsulare

Family: Aristolochiaceae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

Endemic to Uotsuri Island, this species of evergreen perennial grows wild in mountain forests, but is threatened with extinction due to its extreme rarity, due in part to its being collected for horticultural purposes and being trampled by goats.



Abelmoschus moschatus var. *betulifolius*

Family: Malvaceae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

This is an annual herb that grows up to 1.5 m tall and produces yellow flowers about 10 cm in diameter. Its seed pods are 5 to 7 cm long and covered with hard and thick hairs. It grows in the scrubland near the coast.



Dischidia formosana

Family: Asclepiadaceae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

This woody vine clings to trees and rocks near the tops of mountains that are frequently shrouded in fog and clouds. Other than Uotsuri Island, it is only found in Taiwan.



Daphne kiusiana

Family: Thymelaeaceae

Endangered Class IA (CR)

A small evergreen shrub found in bright forests on mountain tops ranging from the southern Kanto Region to the Nansei Islands. In Okinawa Prefecture, it grows naturally only on Iheyajima Island and Uotsuri Island.



Eria ovata

Family: Orchidaceae

Endangered Class IB (EN) Endangered Class II (VU)

This orchid grows on tree trunks in natural forests in mountainous areas. In Japan, it can be found on Iriomotejima Island and Uotsuri Island. It grows to a height of 10 to 23 cm and produces many cream-colored blossoms.



Cirsium japonicum var. *australe*

Family: Compositae

Endangered Class IA (CR) Endangered Class IA (CR)

A perennial herb that grows in coastal areas, where it reaches between 50 and 100 cm in height. In Japan, it is found only on Uotsuri Island.



Trichoglottis lutchuensis

Family: Orchidaceae

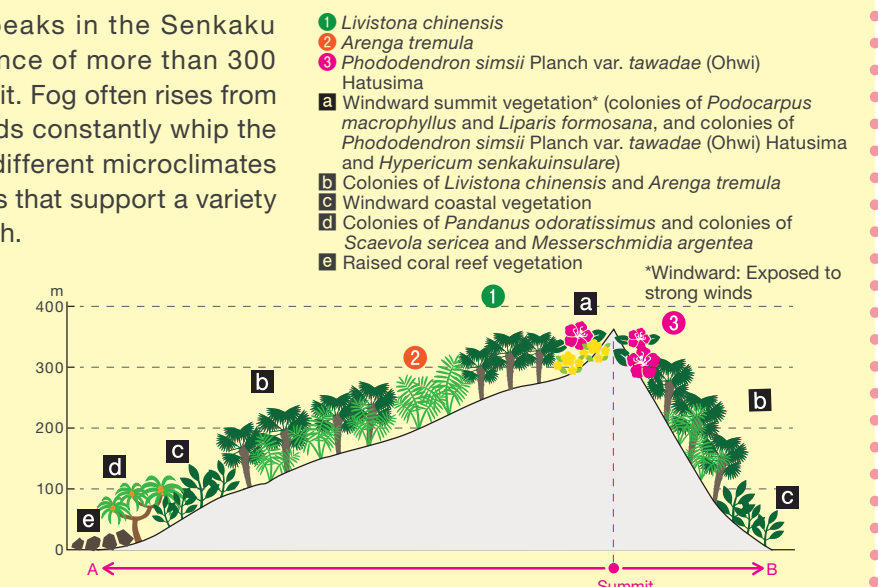
Endangered Class IB (EN) Endangered Class IA (CR)

This orchid grows on tree trunks in natural forests in mountainous areas. It used to grow wild on Ishigakijima Island and Iriomotejima Island, but it is rarely seen there now due to overexploitation.

Plant Distribution on Uotsuri Island

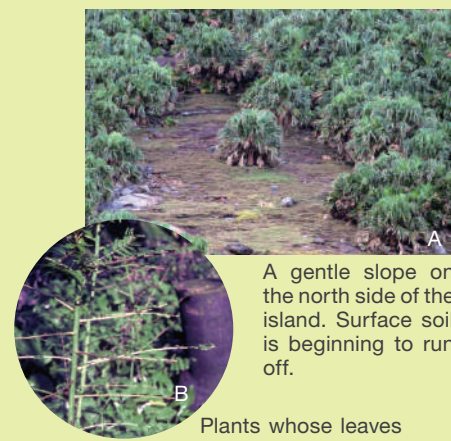
Uotsuri Island has the highest peaks in the Senkaku Islands, with an elevation difference of more than 300 meters from the coast to the summit. Fog often rises from the mountainsides and strong winds constantly whip the beaches and summits. The many different microclimates on this small island provide habitats that support a variety of species, with plants suited to each.

Schematic diagram of the distribution of vegetation on Uotsuri Island
Yoshima Niiro and Kazuharu Shinjo, "Shokubutsu chosa" [Botanical survey], chap. 5 in *Senkaku retto chosa hokokusho: Gakujutsu chosahen* [Senkaku Islands research report: Scientific survey], ed. Okinawa Development Agency (1980)



The Island Landscape: Have the Goats Changed It?

Concerns have been raised about the threat to rare species posed by the growing goat population on Uotsuri Island. In 1978, a private Japanese organization imported one male and one female goat to the island, and today their offspring are estimated to number between 300 and 500. The goats have begun to change the topography of the island, denuding the vegetation and exposing the soil, leading to erosion that is causing the cliffs to collapse.

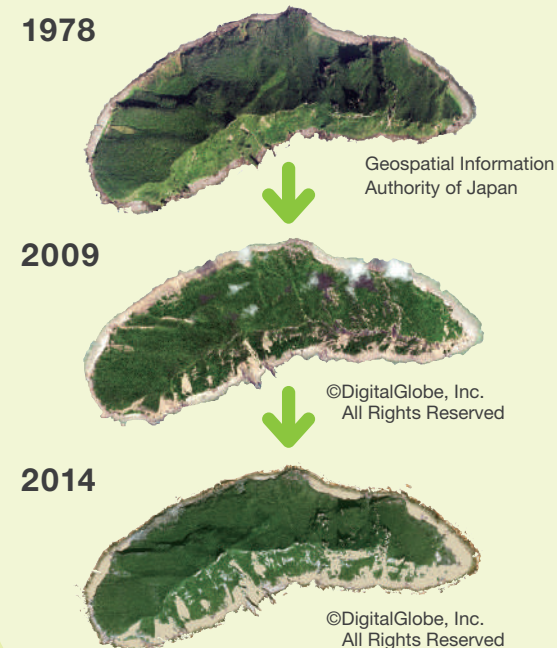


A gentle slope on the north side of the island. Surface soil is beginning to run off.

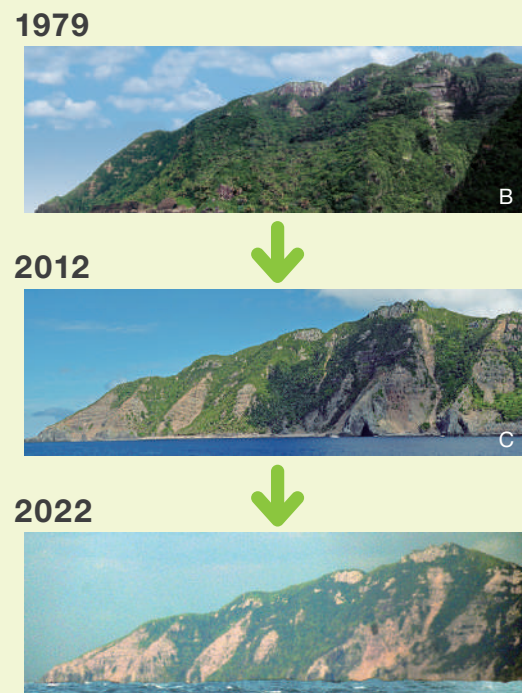
Plants whose leaves have been denuded by goats.

Aerial views of the changes to Uotsuri Island

The surface of the soil is becoming exposed, especially on the southern slopes.



Changes to the southwestern slopes



It's hard to believe only two goats could cause all this . . . I wonder what condition the island is in now?



Initiatives by Ishigaki City

Ishigaki City has taken various initiatives in recognition of the fact that the Senkaku Islands are one of the city's municipal administrative districts.

“Senkaku Islands Day” Ceremony

A ceremony is held every year on January 14 to commemorate the government's decision, in a January 14, 1895 Cabinet decision, to officially incorporate the Senkaku Islands as Japanese territory.



Senkaku Islands Information Center of Ishigaki City

In 2021, the Senkaku Islands Information Center opened its doors on the second floor of the Ishigaki Port Remote Island Terminal. In addition to displaying historical documents and showing videos, a 3D digital model is available that can display a variety of information, including about topography and plant distribution. Please drop by!

Address: Ishigaki Port Remote Island Terminal, 1 Misaki-cho, Ishigaki-shi
*Please ascend the spiral stairs or the ramp on the west side of the building.
Hours: 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM
Holidays: None (Except when the terminal is closed due to typhoons, etc.)
Admission: Free



The Creation of New Administrative Markers

Due to the inconvenience of having an administrative district name, “Tonoshiro,” that covered both Ishigakijima Island and the Senkaku Islands, the district name of the Senkaku Islands was changed to “Tonoshiro Senkaku” in 2020, and new markers bearing this name were also created.

Ishigaki City has applied to the national government, which owns the islands, for permission to install these markers on each island, but the application has not yet been approved.

Until such a time as they are installed, the future markers can be viewed at the Senkaku Islands Information Center of Ishigaki City.



Scientific Research

There is still much that we do not know about the Senkaku Islands and the sea around them. A first step in protecting this precious environment is to conduct in-depth scientific research, such as the boat-based survey conducted by Ishigaki City in 2022.



A poster display summarizing the nature of these studies is on display at the Senkaku Islands Information Center of Ishigaki City.

Answers

Page 1: The distance from Uotsuri Island in the Senkaku Islands to Ishigakijima Island is 150 km. 170 km to Taiwan.



How was your expedition to the Senkaku Islands? We hope you keep up your interest in the Senkaku Islands, our city's natural treasures, and continue to help us take care of them.

Finally, test your knowledge with a quiz!

National Museum of Territory and Sovereignty for KIDS
<https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/ryodo/kids/senkaku.html>
This site is in Japanese.