

Japan studies flora and fauna near Fukushima plant

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This file photo shows a farmer pruning pear trees at a plantation in Fukushima prefecture. Japanese scientists are studying how radiation has affected plants and animals living near the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant, according to an official.

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Researchers are examining [field mice](#), red pine trees, a certain type of shellfish and other wild flora and fauna in and around the 20 kilometre (12 mile) no-go zone surrounding the plant, an Environment Ministry official said on Monday.

"The researchers are studying the impact of high [radiation levels](#) on wild

animals and plants, examining the appearance, reproductive function and possible abnormalities in chromosomes," said the official.

They will also grow seeds from plant samples and monitor the offspring of animals in the research.

The study began in November and an initial report on the findings is expected in March, he said.

The Fukushima Daiichi [nuclear power plant](#), some 220 kilometres north of Tokyo, suffered blasts and fires after the March 11 quake and tsunami crippled its cooling systems, releasing radiation into the environment.

Tens of thousands of people were evacuated from the area near the plant, many abandoning pets and livestock which have since gone feral.

Parts of the exclusion zone are expected to be reclassified to allow people to move back to their homes over the next few years, but other areas are expected to be uninhabitable for several decades.

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