HIGHLIGHTING
Japan
VOL. 143
APRIL 2020

LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

CONTENTS

Features

Also

WHERE TO FIND US

Tokyo Narita Airport terminals 1 ● JR East Travel Service Center (Tokyo Narita Airport) ● JR Tokyo Station Tourist Information Center ● Tokyo Tourist Information Center (Haneda Airport, Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, Keisei Ueno Station) ● Niigata Airport ● Chubu Centrair International Airport Tourist Information & Service ● Kansai Tourist Information Center (Kansai Int'l Airport) ● Fukuoka Airport Tourist Information ● Foreign Press Center/Japan ● Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan ● Delegation of the European Union to Japan ● Waseda University ● Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University ● Ritsumeikan University ● Kokushikan University ● University of Tsukuba ● Keio University ● Meiji University ● Osaka University ● Kyushu University ● Kyoto University ● Tohoku University ● Nagoya University ● Sophia University ● Doshisha University ● Akita International University ● International University of Japan

HIGHLIGHTING
Japan

ISSUE 143, APRIL 2020

THEME FOR **APRIL:**

LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

At the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP10) held in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture in 2010, the Parties agreed a global vision of biological diversity, a world of "Living in Harmony with Nature." We take a look at some examples of Japan's rich biodiversity and at ways in which people in Japan have interacted with nature to conserve it, helping to achieve that global vision.

PRODUCTION The Japan Journal
MANAGING EDITOR Sawaji Osamu
EDITORS Alex Hendy, Chiba Hitoshi, Fujita Mao
EDITORIAL SUPPORT Kiura Eriko
CONTRIBUTORS Kyoko Kato, Sasaki Takashi, Sato Kumiko, Sugiyama Mamoru, Umezawa Akira
DESIGN Imai Mei, Okadome Hirofumi
PHOTOS Aizawa Tadashi, Itabashi Yuichi, Kato Kyoko, Tanaka Satoshi
VIDEOGRAPHY Tanaka Satoshi

ON THE COVER
Living in Harmony with Nature
Photo: Courtesy of Sado Kanko Photo

EDITORS' NOTE
Japanese names in this publication are written in Japanese order: family name first, personal name last.

PRIME MINISTER ABE RECEIVES A COURTESY CALL FROM DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY

Photograph of the Prime Minister receiving the courtesy call

On February 25th, 2020, Prime Minister Abe Shinzo received a courtesy call from H.E. Mr. Rafael Mariano Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Prime Minister Abe welcomed Director General Grossi's first visit to Japan after assuming the office and stated that he would render assistance to the fullest extent to the endeavor of the IAEA led by him as well as he did during former Director General Amano Yukiya's tenure. In response, Director General Grossi expressed his gratitude for the assistance from Japan to the initiatives of the IAEA and stated that the IAEA has been in a close relationship with Japan and he would like to continue this relationship into the future. Director General Grossi also stated that he respects former Director General Amano Yukiya and he visited Japan early to show such attitude.

Prime Minister Abe expressed his appreciation to the cooperation of the IAEA in decommissioning the TEPCO's Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station while mentioning Director General Grossi's visit to the Nuclear Power Station scheduled for February 26th. In response, Director General Grossi stated that he respects Japan's efforts to proceed with the reconstruction of Fukushima and decommission of the nuclear power station in a compatible manner, and he also stated that the IAEA would continue to cooperate with Japan.

With regard to the situation surrounding nuclear issues of North Korea and Iran, Prime Minister Abe stated that he has been placing emphasis on the roles of the IAEA and added that the Government of Japan would continue its close cooperation with the IAEA in this regard. In response, Director General Grossi gave an explanation on recent activities by the IAEA.

Photograph of the Prime Minister receiving the courtesy call

Photographs and text courtesy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and the Cabinet Public Relations Office of the Government of Japan

Living in Harmony with Nature

To help achieve the global vision of biological diversity and a world "Living in Harmony with Nature" — decided ten years ago at COP10 with targets for 2020 — Japan has formulated the National Biodiversity Strategy and is promoting measures to conserve biological diversity and endangered species through laws such as the National Parks Law and the Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. At the private and individual levels too, efforts continue to conserve Japan's rich biodiversity while using it and enjoying it in the same ways as always. Japan's expertise in wildlife conservation and love of nature is also being shared with people overseas.

Photo: Courtesy of Oze Preservation Foundation

Coexistence with Biological Diversity

Torii Toshio, Director General of the Nature Conservation Bureau, Ministry of the Environment

At the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP10) held in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture in 2010, a global vision of biological diversity towards a world "Living in Harmony with Nature" was decided. We asked Torii Toshio, Director General of the Nature Conservation Bureau, Ministry of the Environment, about Japan's biological diversity and how it is being conserved.

Please tell us about the general characteristics of Japan's natural world and biological diversity.

The Japanese archipelago extends a great distance north to south from subarctic Hokkaido to the subtropical Nansei Islands and Ogasawara Islands. It also has a complex variety of geographical features, varies greatly in height above sea level, and has considerable rainfall and snowfall. Due to these climates and geographical conditions, Japan has a natural environment rich in biological diversity. There are over 90,000 species already known in Japan. If unknown species are also included, the total number is estimated at 300,000. The Japanese archipelago is separated from the Eurasian continent by sea, so one distinct feature of the environment is a large number of endemic species that only live in Japan. For example, around 80% of amphibians and around 40% of land mammals are endemic. By international standards, this is a very high proportion. The famous Japanese monkeys that soak themselves in snowy hot springs are also an endemic species, and Japan is the only developed country where wild monkeys live.

What kind of lifestyles have Japanese people had in this rich natural environment?

Although rice has been farmed in Japan from long ago, because there is little flat land, people also lived close to the forests and did other farming. They acquired household fuel, building materials, food and other materials needed for daily life from nearby forests. These areas where people live in close communication with nature are known by the Japanese word *satoyama*. There are also living things in these satoyama that rely on the actions of humans to stay alive. For example, the endangered Asian fawnlily lives in forests that are thinned by humans, allowing sunlight to enter in the early spring. There are also many species living in ponds of water for agricultural use, including dragonflies and other insects, frogs and other amphibians, and species of fish. In pastureland, such as the Aso area of Kumamoto Prefecture, each early spring locals set fire to the fields

Photo: Aizawa Tadashi

in a process of controlled burning. This controlled burning prevents pastureland from being taken over by shrubs and trees, and also happens to create an environment in which endemic species such as butterflies and wildflowers can live.

It is said that these precious environments are facing crises due to various kinds of change. Please tell us the specifics of these crises that Japan faces.

According to the National Biodiversity Strategy of Japan 2012-2020, formulated in 2012, Japan's biological diversity is facing four crises. The first is a crisis caused by human activities, including development. Due to land reclamation and other development, or overexploitation for ornamental or commercial use, reduction in the number of living creatures, extinctions, and deterioration of living environments are progressing. The second is a crisis caused by reduced human activities. Due to a lack of available workers caused by population decrease, decreasing birthrate and aging population, the balance of ecosystems is being destroyed by insufficient maintenance in satoyama. The third is a crisis caused by artificially introduced factors. Ecosystems are disturbed by the spread of invasive alien species that prey on native species or interbreed with them. Lastly, the fourth is a crisis caused by changes in the global environment. Changes in the environment such as global warming lead to increased risk of extinction in vulnerable flora and fauna such as corals and alpine plants.

What kind of work is being done to prevent Japan's distinctive biological diversity being lost?

In order to reach the Aichi Biodiversity Targets that were decided ten years ago at COP10 as targets by 2020 with the aim of conserving biological diversity, Japan has formulated the National Biodiversity Strategy I mentioned earlier and is doing various things. For example, it is promoting measures to conserve biological diversity and endangered species through existing laws such as the Natural Parks Law and the Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. In 2019, the Nature Conservation Law was revised to make the seabed of deep ocean regions, with their precious ecologies and biological resources, into conserved areas.

Overseas meanwhile, Japan is promoting the Satoyama Initiative that it proposed at COP10. Via this initiative, Japan is working with the United Nations, NGOs and other organizations to support projects in some areas of developing countries that have made use of blessings of nature in a sustainable way while conserving the natural environment and developing new sources of income for locals, such as ecotourism and the manufacture of value added commodities that use local products.

It's important to know where and what kind of biological diversity exists in order to conserve it. What kind of places are you thinking of in Japan?

Japan has thirty-four national parks and there is a diversity of living creatures in all these parks. For example, the Shiretoko National Park in Hokkaido has large birds and mammals that are unusual in other regions, such as Steller's sea eagles, brown bears and killer whales. We can also see the coexistence of people and nature in Japan's national parks. One of Japan's most famous shrines, Ise Jingu, is located amid dense forest in the Ise-Shima National Park, Mie Prefecture. In Western Japan, the Setonaikai National Park spans eleven prefectures and has distinctive views of lush green islands floating in the sea and terraced fields that make use of steep slopes running down to the coast. I'd like people to enjoy these scenes of intertwined nature and human life offered by the national parks in Japan.

Interview by SAWAJI OSAMU

The Waterfall Cherry of Miharu

An ancient cherry tree is the star attraction of the cherry blossom season in Miharu Town, Fukushima Prefecture.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

In Miharu Town, central Fukushima Prefecture, there stands a single cherry tree that attracts many visitors. *Miharu Takizakura*, an ornamental weeping cherry, is one of the Three Great Cherry Trees of Japan, together with the *Usuzumizakura* in Neo (Motosu City, Gifu Prefecture) and the *Jindaizakura* in Yamataka (Hokuto City, Yamanashi Prefecture). The tree is 12 meters tall, 9.5 meters in circumference, and its branches extend 22 meters east to west and 18 meters north to south. In the spring, it blooms with countless small, light pink blossoms. Because the magnificent sight resembles a waterfall, the tree is called the *takizakura* ("waterfall cherry").

This famous tree is in fact just one of approximately 2,000 weeping cherries in Miharu, which flourished as a castle town in the past and has many temples and shrines where cherry trees grow. In Miharu, these cherry trees bloom simultaneously, and during the blooming season the entire town becomes a destination to see cherry blossoms.

Miura Reina from the Tourism Department at Miharu Machizukuri Corporation says, "We gaze at the blossoms day after day when they are in bloom. About thirty years ago, the flowers would bloom somewhere around April 20, but in recent years, the trees often bloom in early April, perhaps due to the effects of global warming. The trees began blooming on

Miharu Takizakura in full bloom
Photo: Courtesy of Miharu Machizukuri Corporation

April 8 in 2019, and reached their peak on April 16."

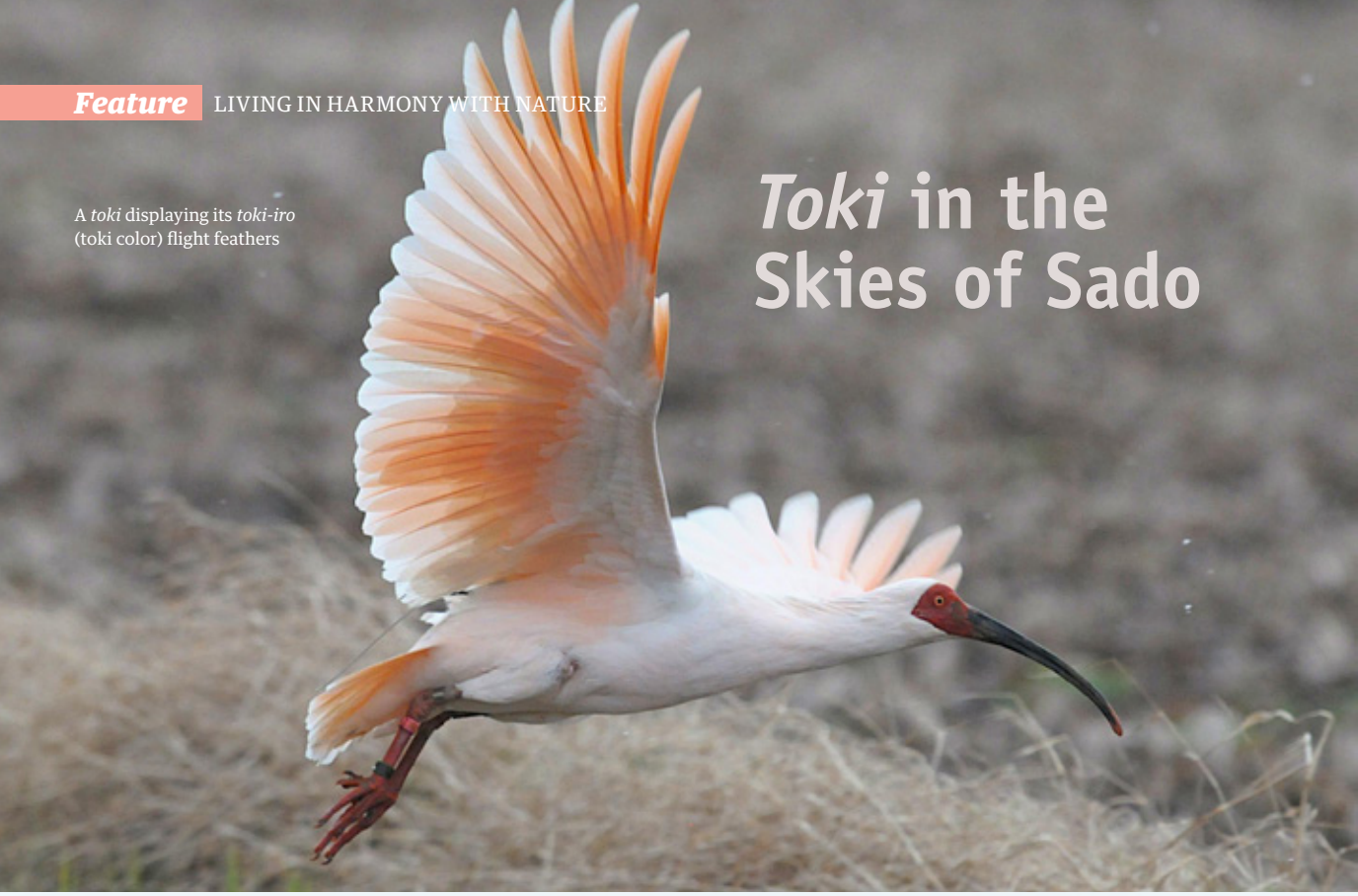
The actual age of the famous takizakura is unknown, but it has been estimated at over 1,000 years old, and was designated a national natural monument in 1922. Actions have been taken to protect the precious tree over the years. In 1990, the Takizakura Preservation Society was formed, and each year, members remove weeds from around the roots, improve the soil with compost, and remove and disinfect dead branches under the guidance of tree doctors. In 2005, over twenty branches were broken by heavy snow, and so the Society carried out repairs with assistance from the national government.

"There have been visitors who have experienced major illnesses and are moved to tears on seeing the tree, saying, 'I'm so glad I was able to see this tree while I was alive'," says Miura. "As the times change, and even as the old townscape disappears, the takizakura is always here, unchanging. The same holds true for me, but I think there are a lot of locals who come to see the tree when feeling down."

In the year following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, residents from the coastal regions, who came to Miharu for shelter after their homes were destroyed, enjoyed flower viewing parties together with locals and found peace for their broken hearts.

The Miharu Town Hall has gifted saplings all over Japan and works to increase offspring trees in order to pass down the takizakura to future generations. Miura says, "Each year, the children at the school next to the tree pick up seeds and plant them. The offspring of the takizakura tree that are raised are then planted in many different places." So far, saplings and seeds have been gifted to Taiwan, Hungary, Poland, Austria, Bhutan, the UK and United States, among other countries.

Miura says, "There are about 15,000 cherry trees in Miharu Town. When they are in bloom, a truly dream-like scene expands before your eyes." Surely these beautiful blossoms will continue to bring peace to the hearts of many.



A *toki* displaying its *toki-iro* (toki color) flight feathers

Toki in the Skies of Sado

Once in danger of extinction, the *toki* (Japanese crested ibis) of Sado Island in Niigata Prefecture have returned to the wild thanks to measures such as artificial breeding and habitat improvement conducted over many years.

SASAKI TAKASHI

TOKI (*Nipponia Nippon*) stands 70 to 80 centimeters tall and has a wingspan of 130 centimeters. It has a whitish plumage, except during the breeding season, when its outstretched wings reveal rosy pink-tinged flight feathers. Since ancient times, that stunning color has been known in Japan as *toki-iro* (toki color).

Distributed widely in East Asia, toki were a common sight in the countryside all over Japan until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the population suddenly declined due to overhunting. Furthermore, after World War Two, the widespread use of pesticides in paddy fields led to major changes in the natural habitat, such as a decrease in the numbers of small fish, frogs and insects on which the birds feed. As a result, toki became in danger of extinction.

Even the designation of toki as a protected species in 1952 did not halt their population decline. So in 1967, the prefectural government established a conservation center in the last habitat of the toki, Sado City (formerly Niibo Village) on remote Sado Island in Niigata Prefecture.

"The role of our center is to raise chicks born through artificial and natural breeding, acclimate them to the wild and release them," says Kimura Hirobumi, current Director of the Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center.

In 1981, the Ministry of the Environment captured the last five toki in Japan living on Sado Island and

All photos: Courtesy of Sado Kanko Photo

Toki wading in paddy fields

began artificial breeding. When the birds were moved from the wild setting to the captive breeding environment, toki became an extinct species in the wild. The last bird born in the wild in 2003 died without leaving any offspring. However, 1999 saw the first successful attempt at artificial breeding of toki from a pair donated by China. The center continued to improve its breeding and rearing methods, and slowly but surely the number of toki bred in captivity increased.

At the same time, an environment was created that enabled the birds to survive in the wild. Sado City created biotopes and held environmental learning sessions for children, while local farmers cultivated rice using farming methods that nurture living creatures. Such methods included curbing the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, creating fishways to connect rice paddies and water sources, and irrigating the rice fields even in winter, to create a habitat for the living creatures that provide subsistence for toki. The rice cultivated by this farming method has been marketed since 2007 as Toki Brand Rice certified by Sado City.

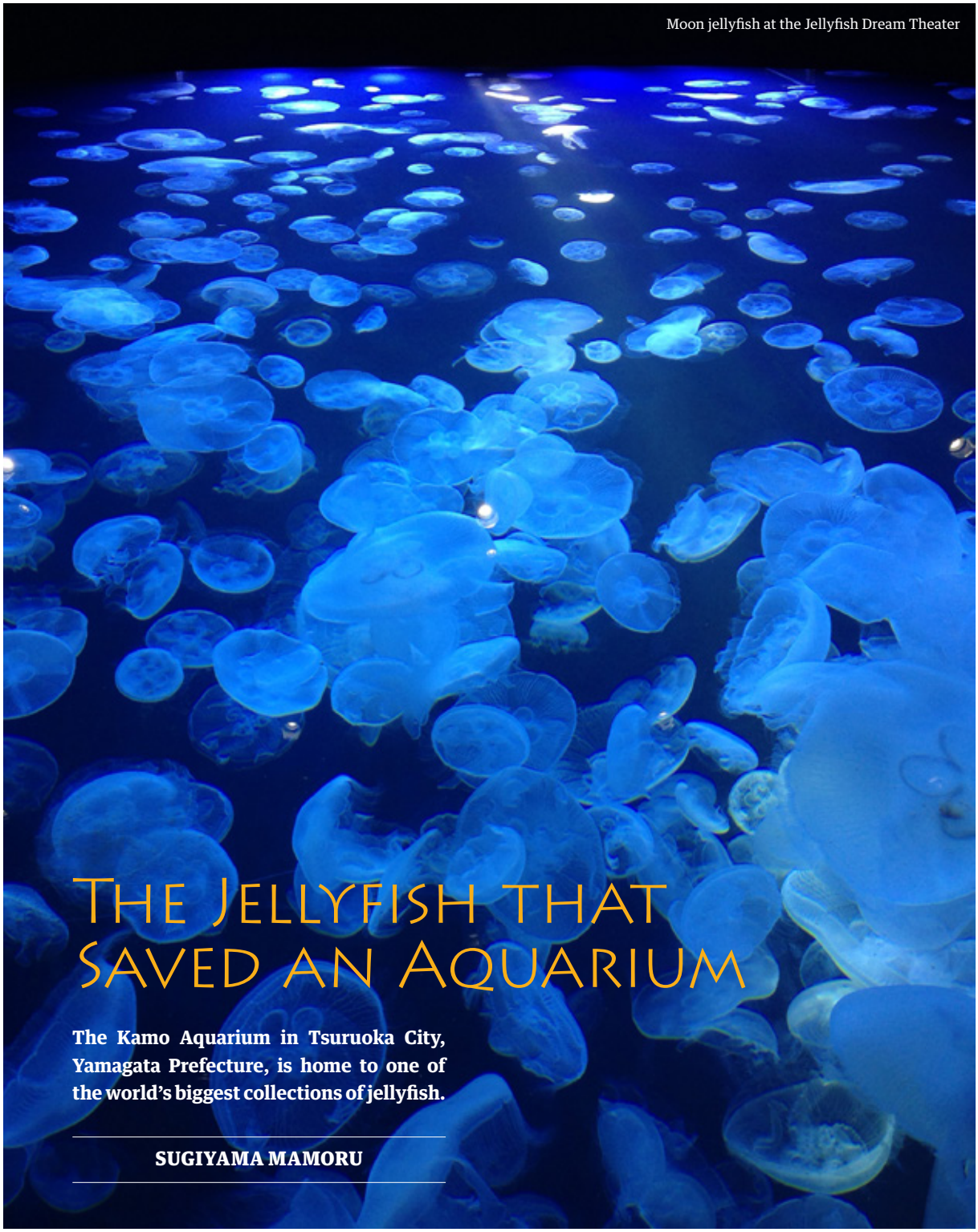
"In 2008, we released the first ten toki born and raised in the conservation center, and in 2012 a chick was born in the wild for the first time in thirty-six years. The combined efforts of the national government, local governments and local residents have come to fruition," says Kimura.

Today, toki are also being bred outside Sado at facilities such as the Nagaoka City Toki Breeding Center in Niigata Prefecture and Tama Zoological Park in Hino City, Tokyo. The total number of birds being bred in captivity is now 176. Meanwhile, the number of wild toki on Sado Island has increased to around 400. Toki that have crossed the sea from Sado are even being sighted on mainland Honshu.

Toki are not easy to spot in the wild. However, at Toki Forest Park adjacent to the Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center you can observe mounted specimens of toki and enjoy exhibits introducing initiatives to return the birds to the wild, as well as see toki being reared in captivity.

In Sado, many people continue to work together and keep watch to ensure that the habitat of these delicate birds with their beautiful pale rose-colored wings remains secure.

Sado Island



Moon jellyfish at the Jellyfish Dream Theater

The Jellyfish that Saved an Aquarium

The Kamo Aquarium in Tsuruoka City, Yamagata Prefecture, is home to one of the world's biggest collections of jellyfish.

SUGIYAMA MAMORU

All Photos: Courtesy of Kamo Aquarium

A concert at the Jellyfish Dream Theater

THE Tsuruoka City Kamo Aquarium is located on the Sea of Japan coast in the south of the Shonai region of Yamagata Prefecture. The previous aquarium, the Yamagata Prefectural Aquarium, opened in 1930 and was a popular local cultural facility, attracting more than 200,000 visitors per annum in the latter half of the 1960s after it moved to the new building and reopened as the Kamo Aquarium. However, with increasing options for leisure, visitors dropped below 100,000 in the latter half of the 1990s, and though the aquarium held exhibitions of the Asian small-clawed otter, sea otter and other popular animals, this didn't produce the results that were hoped for.

At that time, baby jellyfish suddenly appeared from the polyps of the upside-down jellyfish which were attached to coral reef that was being displayed as a special exhibit. Those jellyfish were then raised and were exhibited when they had grown, and because the sight of the jellyfish softly swimming in the tanks was well received, the aquarium began to put effort into the jellyfish exhibits.

Watanabe Yohei, from the general affairs department at the Kamo Aquarium, says, "What really got the ball rolling was the *Kurage wo Taberu Kai* (Jellyfish Dinner Party), which was held in 2000 to promote the fact that we had the biggest variety of jellyfish on display in Japan, with fifteen varieties. The unique foods offered, including jellyfish sushi and shabu-shabu were widely talked about, and led to the aquarium being known across the country." After this event, the aquarium started offering ramen and ice cream with jellyfish bits inside, jellyfish sashimi set meals, and more at the aquarium restaurant. They also became very popular.

Over eighty varieties of jellyfish can be gathered throughout the year along the Shonai Beach which expands out in front of the Kamo Aquarium, and so initially, the exhibits centered around local jellyfish, including moon jellyfish and Japanese sea nettles. However, jellyfish only live for about a year at most, and so stable jellyfish breeding was necessary to regularly exhibit the jellyfish. Watanabe says, "There were many things we didn't know about jellyfish breeding, and we developed appropriate breeding methods for each species through repeated trial and error. The right size and water flow for each jellyfish species is necessary for the exhibit tanks as well, so we had to improve on that."

Kamo Aquarium established the Tsuruoka Jellyfish Laboratory in 2003, producing many results including succeeding in breeding a wide variety of jellyfish, such as edible jellyfish, brown-banded moon jellyfish, and purple jellyfish. Researchers from aquariums and research organizations from all over the world, including the Aquarium de Paris in France, come to learn about this jellyfish breeding and raising.

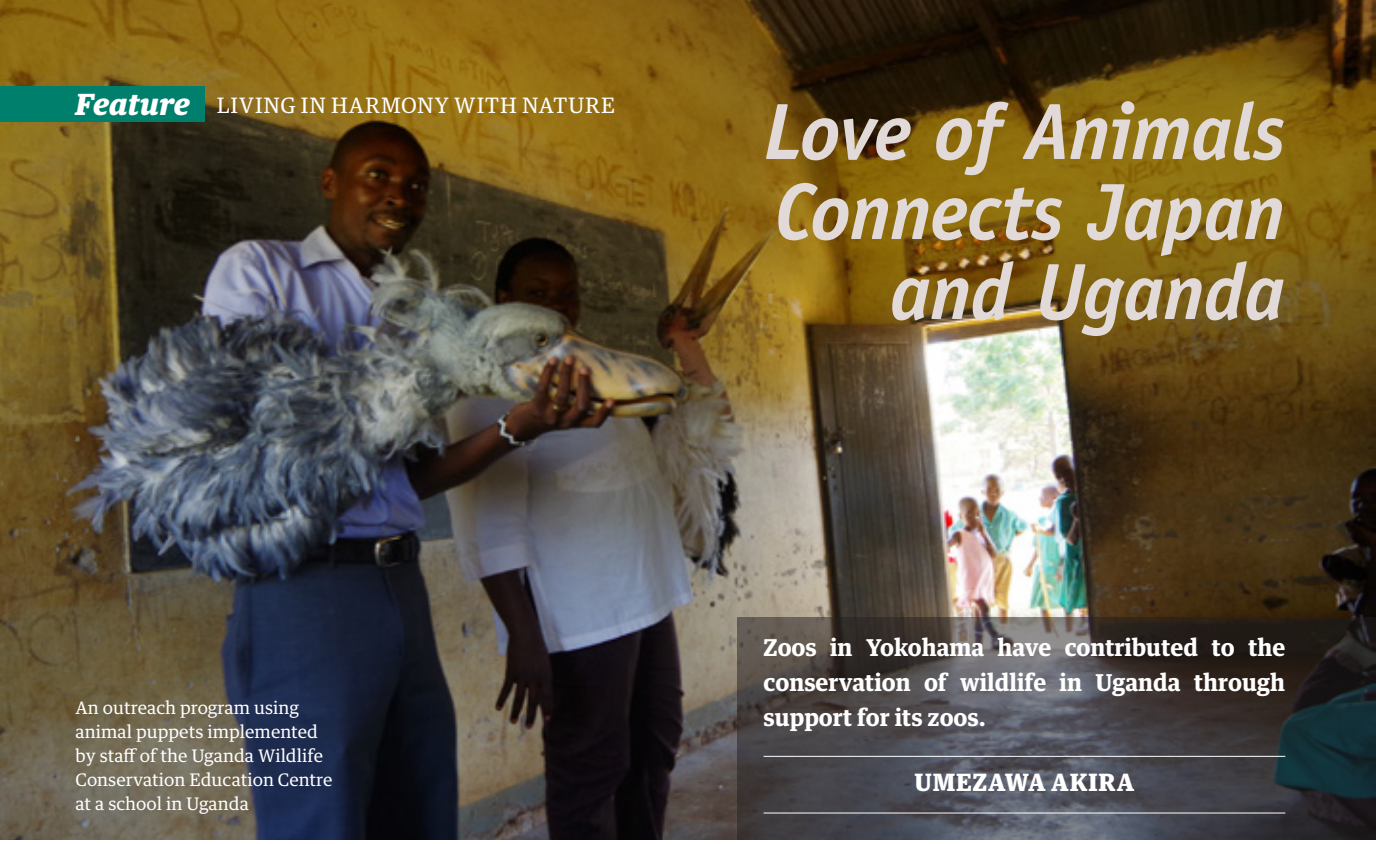
In 2014, a new aquarium building was built on neighboring land, with more than twice the space for the jellyfish exhibit of the older building, allowing more than sixty varieties of jellyfish to be regularly exhibited. The highlight of the new building is the Jellyfish Dream Theater, where approximately 10,000 moon jellyfishes undulate in a circular tank 5 meters in diameter, one of the world's largest. In winter, the Theater is illuminated with rainbow-colored lights, producing a fantastical atmosphere.

The aquarium also hosts other events to increase the number of jellyfish fans, such as an overnight event where guests spend the night in front of the aquarium tanks, concerts in the Jellyfish Dream Theater, and more. The aquarium has now become one of the representative tourist spots for Yamagata Prefecture, attracting approximately 500,000 visitors annually from Japan and abroad.

Watanabe says, "We procure new jellyfish and have been given gifts from other aquariums. The species on exhibit differ based on breeding status and season, and we also update the tanks each year, so you can always encounter new jellyfish here."

Watching the jellyfish move peacefully through the water has a soothing effect that will calm your heart.

Love of Animals Connects Japan and Uganda



An outreach program using animal puppets implemented by staff of the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre at a school in Uganda

Zoos in Yokohama have contributed to the conservation of wildlife in Uganda through support for its zoos.

UMEZAWA AKIRA

THE Republic of Uganda is a landlocked country with a rich natural environment, said to be home to the largest number of animal species on the African continent. In recent years, however, much of this wildlife has come under threat due to deforestation and poaching.

In response to this situation, the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre (UWEC) on the shores of Lake Victoria conducts activities such as wildlife conservation and conservation education. On a 29-hectare site, UWEC breeds and exhibits some fifty animal species, including giraffes, elephants and chimpanzees. As well as attracting some 300,000 visitors annually, the Centre is a hub for captive breeding and wildlife rescue, and provides conservation education to the community. From 2008 to 2017 the Yokohama Greenery Foundation implemented the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Project as a JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) Partnership Program for Grassroots Cooperation in Technology in order to support these activities.

The project grew out of the 4th Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD IV) held in Yokohama in 2008. The idea of a project relating to wildlife had been aired as a potential project for international cooperation in Africa prior to the conference in Yokohama.

"Around that time, a staff member of the Foundation was working on the launch of eco-tours at Kalinzu forest in Western Uganda as a Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteer. Therefore, Uganda was a familiar country to zoos in Yokohama, and since the UWEC is a comparatively advanced zoo among African nations, city officials went to survey the site and reported the technical expertise possessed by zoos in Yokohama to UWEC. The project resulted from the realization that Japanese zoos could contribute to the conservation of local wildlife," says Nagakura Kasumi, who has been involved in the project since 2011, including in the capacity of project manager.

The project was implemented mainly by three zoos managed by the Yokohama Greenery Foundation (Yokohama, Nogeyama and Kanazawa Zoological Gardens) and the Preservation and Research Center, the City of Yokohama, a research facility in Yokohama. Specifically, the project accepted trainees from Uganda in the fields of "veterinary medicine," "animal husbandry," "education" and "zoo management," dispatched experts from Yokohama, and provided the necessary materials.

All photos: Courtesy of Yokohama Greenery Foundation

In the veterinary field, for example, medical treatment materials were provided to ensure that animals being bred or protected were kept healthy. Such materials included surgical drills used for bone fracture surgery, endoscopes that determine the sex of birds and ultrasonic scalers for dental treatment. Local staff were trained in the use of these materials by Japanese experts.

The management divisions of the zoos helped strengthen the management of UWEC. As part of this initiative, from 2014 CEO and managerial staff of UWEC were invited to a zoo in Yokohama to attend a training program in zoo management.

"The training covered things such as the custom of staff assembling each morning for the morning meeting and communicating to everyone the work to be done that day, and how when anything happened in the zoo, the staff liaised with each other by radio wirelessly. During their stay in Yokohama they also learned that staff in charge of husbandry and education in Yokohama collaborate on an equal footing. When CEO introduced such activities into UWEC, it quickly led to active personnel exchange and information sharing beyond the boundaries that had previously separated staff in charge of husbandry and education, resulting in smoother communication at the site," says Nagakura.

This steady cooperative relationship has paid off, with staff at UWEC now proposing new ideas. One such idea is a "Children's Zoo."

"Inspired by the Japanese zoo, the staff started thinking that they would like to create a place where Ugandan children can learn by interacting with animals. When the zoo partially opened in 2017 they sent photos. I was deeply moved to see how happy the children and UWEC staff looked."

In recognition of its efforts, in 2015 UWEC was certified as an official government agency, ensuring its stable operation. In addition, it won various awards, including the Best Conservation Institute award in Uganda and the Pan-African Association of Zoos and Aquaria (PAAZA) Chairman's award.

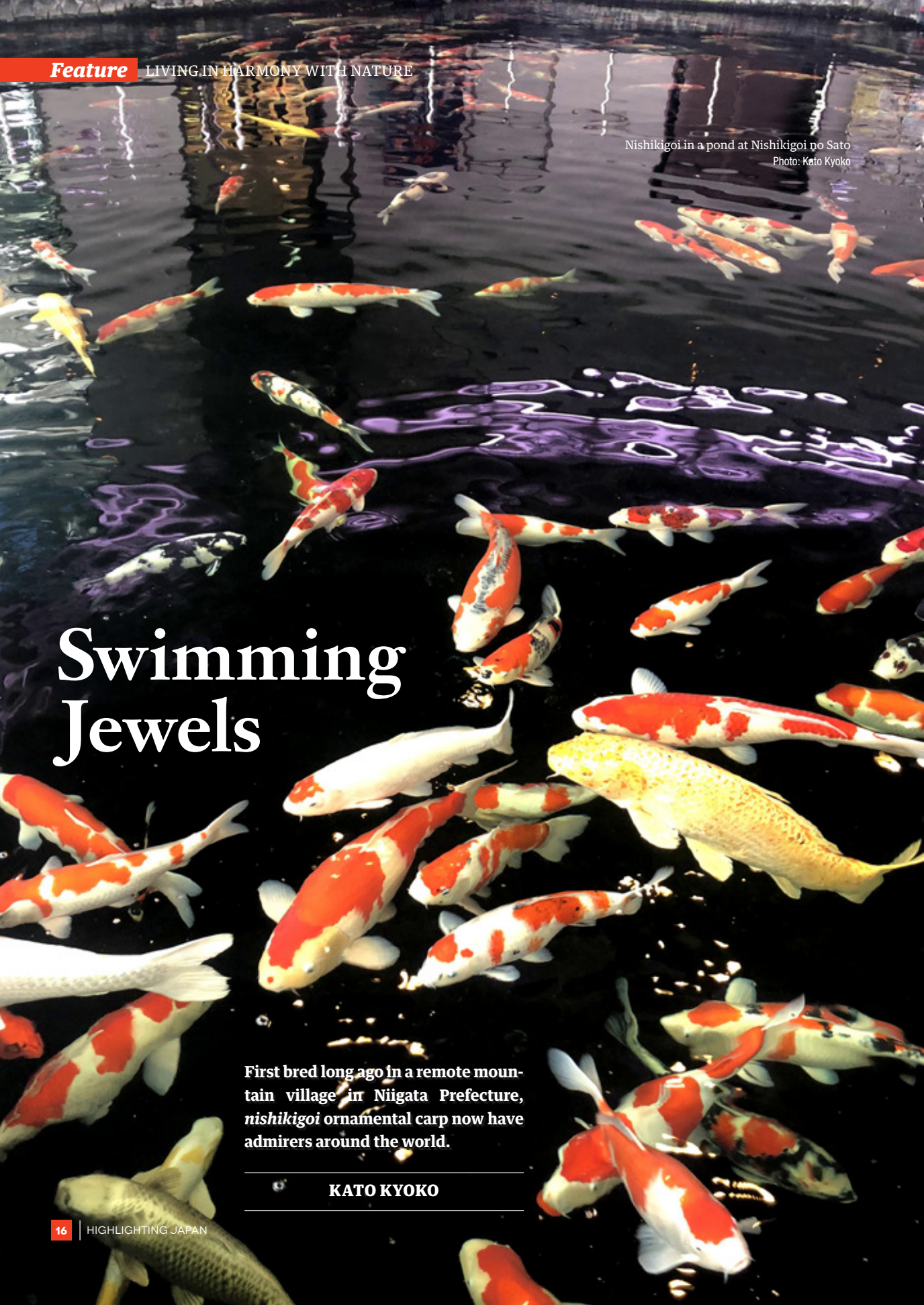
"As a result of this project, Ugandan people have been able to develop human resources that can discover and solve issues on their own in a way that is appropriate for Uganda and ensures that UWEC can continue to play its role. We too learned a great deal. We will continue to use the experience gained through the project to conserve wildlife."


1


2


3

1 Medical treatment training at the Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre
2 The hatching of an ostrich from an artificially incubated egg at Nogeyama Zoological Gardens in Yokohama City, Kanagawa Prefecture
3 The Children's Zoo at Uganda Wildlife Conservation Education Centre



Nishikigoi in a pond at Nishikigoi no Sato
Photo: Kato Kyoko

Swimming Jewels

First bred long ago in a remote mountain village in Niigata Prefecture, *nishikigoi* ornamental carp now have admirers around the world.

KATO KYOKO

Terraced paddies in Ojiya City, Niigata Prefecture
Photo: KURO

NISHIKIGOI are large ornamental carp (*koi*) of Japanese origin now found in ponds around the world, where they are admired for their beautiful colors, unique patterns and approachability. The fish were first bred around 200 years ago in a mountainous area then called Nijyumurago near present-day Ojiya City in Niigata Prefecture. The name "nishikigoi" came into use as the bright colored patterns of the fish are evocative of *nishiki*, or brocade, a high-quality woven fabric. The fish are also known colloquially as "swimming jewels."

The Nishikigoi no Sato (Nishikigoi Village) tourist facility in Ojiya City, the birthplace of nishikigoi, features a Japanese-style garden with four ponds where approximately 340 nishikigoi carp in twenty species are bred. People can enjoy watching the nishikigoi swim gracefully in front of them all year round.

"Located in a steep mountainous area with a lot of snow in winter, the people in Nijyumurago had difficulty securing food in the winter," says Hirasawa Katsuyoshi, the manager of Nishikigoi Village. "They therefore bred edible carp to be a precious source of protein. The hamlet was often snowed in, and the villagers had nothing that could really be called entertainment. It is understood that they consequently became intrigued by the slight differences in the colors and patterns of the carp they were raising, and started to engage in selective breeding in their own original way."

The people of Nijyumurago had been growing rice from water supplied by the mountains in terraced paddies carved into the steep landscape. However, the snowmelt draining into the paddies was so cold that rice did not grow properly. So they created ponds, called *tanaike*, to retain water in the uppermost terrace, which was then supplied to the rice paddies after it had been warmed by the sun. This combination of rice field terraces and tanaike is a rare landscape feature in the world, and a beautiful one.

In addition to irrigating the rice fields, the tanaike were also used to raise edible carp. At first the carp were the dark gray colored variety known as *magoi*, but it happened that some slightly reddish carp and some with patterns were born due to genetic mutation. At the same time, there was a different type of wild carp called *asagi* that had indigo or light blue bodies and red pectoral fin areas. People were intrigued by these carp with their colorful, patterned bodies and interbred them with the domestic carp to create nishikigoi with a broader range of beautiful colors and patterns.

Nowadays there are more than 100 varieties of nishikigoi. The Fishery Cooperative of Ojiya City Nishikigoi includes approximately sixty nishikigoi breeders, and 80-90% of their nishikigoi are exported overseas.

Needless to say, beautiful colors and balanced patterns are important factors in nishikigoi appreciation. In competitions, other desirable traits in a fish include having a voluminous and well-balanced body shape with a straight spine, vividness, glossiness, and neat scale patterns.

"The thing we pay the most attention to in breeding nishikigoi is the development of the right water. Having water that is too clean isn't good because we lose the natural bacteria that purify the water. We measure the oxygen concentration, pH level and water temperature every day to maintain the water quality suitable for the breeding of nishikigoi," says Hirasawa.

Nishikigoi are known as a "symbol of peace" because their schools do not have a controlling boss and individual fish do not engage in bullying. The peaceful creatures also get used to humans easily. Thanks to their excellent adaptability to their surroundings, nishikigoi grow to a large size if raised in large ponds but will not grow excessively if they are raised in smaller garden ponds. The number of nishikigoi lovers is rising because people can enjoy watching the fish in ponds of all sizes, whatever their living circumstances.

The Beauty of

Mt. Hiuchigatake viewed over Lake Ozenuma

Oze National Park and its beautiful marshland has overcome a variety of environmental challenges thanks to the support of many people.

SASAKI TAKASHI

From mid-May to mid-October, beautiful landscapes filled with blossoming alpine plants can be enjoyed in Oze National Park. The spectacle is captured in the hit song of the fifties *Natsu no Omoide* (Memory of the Summer), the popularity of which attracted many visitors to Oze.

Oze National Park extends across prefectural borders, reaching into Gunma, Fukushima, Niigata and Tochigi. Centering in Ozegahara marshland and Lake Ozenuma, the park has the largest mountainous marshland in Honshu, spanning nearly 6 kilometers east and west and 2 kilometers north and south. Mt. Hiuchigatake and Mt. Shibutsu are two among several towering mountains in the area.

Uno Shotaro of the Oze Preservation Foundation says of Oze's unique characteristics, "Many people may associate Oze with the Ozegahara marshland. Because the annual average temperature is low at around 4°C, dying plants decompose poorly and transform into an accumulation of peat. It is estimated that between 0.7 and 0.8 millimeters of peat accumulate per year. It may have taken a very long time, 6,000-8,000 years, for the layer to have become as thick as it is today."

Ponds called *chito*, diverse in size, are dotted around the marshland of Ozegahara, creating a habitat for many creatures. More than 900 species of plants grow in Oze, including the famous *mizubasho* (lit. water plantains), which rise from the snowmelt in May and June, and *kanzou* daylilies, which cover the marshland in a yellow-orange blanket in the summer. The flowers bloom successively one after another between mid-May and mid-October. Thanks to the abundant vegetation, the marshes and surrounding forests of Oze are also home to many mammals, birds, amphibians, fish, insects and other creatures. Hikers may spot small creatures such as butterflies, dragonflies, short-tailed weasels, dormice, waterfowl and many other creatures that are rarely seen on flat land.

Despite its great abundance, the nature of Oze

All photos: Courtesy of Oze Preservation Foundation

Oze Preserved

Hikers cross the marshland on raised wooden paths

has experienced several crises in the past. A project to construct a hydroelectric dam using the abundant water of Oze had been put forward. Another project would have built a large motor road connecting Fukushima and Gunma. However, local residents and researchers voiced their disagreement in an effort to protect the rich nature of Oze. In the end, all the projects were cancelled.

The Oze boom triggered a surge of visitors to Oze who trampled the precious marshland. As a solution to this problem, the construction of wooden paths started in the 1950s and efforts to restore vegetation have continued since then. Around that time, the waste brought by tourists became a serious problem in Oze. It was significantly reduced after a campaign encouraging hikers to take their waste home with them was introduced in the 1970s. Pioneered nationally in Oze, the progressive effort spread across national parks and tourist destinations around the country. In this way, the rich nature of Oze has been handed down and remains intact today.

"The generation of people that yearned for Oze, listening to *Natsu no Omoide* on the radio, is already elderly," points out Uno. "The number of hikers has dropped considerably. If the people that are aware of the beauty of Oze continues to decrease, it is possible that the nature here can no longer be protected or handed down to future generations. To prevent this from happening, we try to improve and maintain the wooden paths and other facilities while also exercising care for the environment, so that more people of all ages, children and the elderly alike, can safely enjoy Oze."

Oze's famous *mizubasho*

A *Wa-herb* selection

The Blessings of *Wa-Herb*

In Japan, the plants collectively referred to as *wa-herb* are used to add flavor to food and support people's lives in many different situations.

Swertia

All photos: Courtesy of Japan Herb Federation

SATO KUMIKO

PEOPLE in some regions such as Europe and Southeast Asia have a long-nurtured culture of using herbs, such as mint, rosemary, parsley and coriander, to add aroma to food and for aromatherapy. Japanese people too have a long history of using herbs and spices. In Japanese cuisine, *shiso* (perilla), *sansho* (pepper) and ginger are commonly used, while *mitsuba* (Japanese chervil) and *wasabi* (Japanese horseradish), unique to Japan, are two more examples. As in Europe, mint (*hakka*), parsley (*shaku*) and elderflower (*niwatoko*) have also long been used.

The Japan Herb Federation defines *wa-herb* ("wa" means Japanese) as the useful plants that have grown naturally or been cultivated in many parts of Japan since before the Edo period (1603-1867).


Sansho (Japanese pepper)


Chameleon plant


Yuzu

According to Furuya Masaki, director of the federation, the appeals of wa-herb are not limited to their use in meals. "Geographically, the Japanese archipelago is long north-south and has wide differences in altitude. Vegetation is very diverse in Japan and our ancestors enjoyed the blessings of many plants. If you look at the traditional lifestyles of Japanese people, you can clearly see how plants have colorfully contributed to people's clothing, food and housing."

Fittings such as *shoji* in wooden Japanese-style houses involve the use of *washi* Japanese paper made from the fibers of *kozo* (paper mulberry) and *mitsumata*. Tatami is made from rushes with a superb ability to absorb and release moisture and also a wonderful scent. Rice straw, bamboo, the crimson glory vine and other species were used to make household goods such as baskets. Hemp fibers were used to weave cloth, which was dyed with plants creating an indigo called Japan blue, safflower, madder red, purple and other colors. Many of these pigments are considered to have antibacterial or insect-repelling effects.

"Japan has the world's longest life expectancy. I believe the secret of its longevity is that people have long taken wa-herb grown in Japan as foods and medicines. Wa-herb contain many useful parts, and the entirety of the plants, including flowers, leaves, stems, roots, fruits and barks are used for many different purposes. The culture of using these herbs as ingredients has been nurtured in the areas where they have long grown and are examples of local wisdom. I believe we should revive and use this wisdom for the benefit of all Japanese people today," says Furuya.

For example, there are traditional food cultures around the country which make good use of leaves as ingredients for wrapping foods. Examples include sushi rolled in persimmon or striped bamboo leaves, and sweet rice cakes rolled in cherry, oak, Japanese ginger or shell ginger leaves. These leaves help to preserve and add their scent to the food, enhancing its flavor. Wa-herb is also used in baths. The custom of floating seasonal herbs in bathtubs has taken root in households. For example, people put *yuzu* in baths on the winter solstice, as the fruit effectively stimulates blood circulation and warms the body. For Tango no Sekku on May 5, an annual ceremony to pray for the healthy growth of children, *shobu* (sweet flag) is placed into bathtubs as it has a pleasant aroma and is also said to be good for health.

Wa-herb has a long history of medicinal use. According to Furuya, Japan's five major traditional medicines are Thunberg's geranium (*Geranium thunbergii*), chameleon plant (*Houttuynia cordata*), Swertia (*Swertia japonica*), grand ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) and angelica tree (*Aralia elata*), which have been used as gastrointestinal medicines and antidotes. Teas prepared with wormwood or loquat leaves are commonly used to relax the mind and body.

"Recently, people mix several types of wa-herb in the teas they drink. Wa-herb is mostly familiar plants but they are a treasure. If you adapt them to your lifestyle while learning from tradition, your everyday life will be enriched," says Furuya.


Soup made with *nana-kusa* (seven herbs) of spring

Host Towns' Ties with the World

Host Towns across Japan are deepening their ties with the people of counterpart countries and regions that will take part in the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

The Host Town logo

SAWAJI OSAMU

THE Host Town Initiative is a way for local governments in Japan to use sports, culture and economic activities to interact with citizens of counterpart countries and regions who will participate in the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, and also to revitalize their local areas. This Host Town Initiative is the first in the history of the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

As of the end of February 2020, 487 local governments were registered as Host Towns. Also, around 167 countries and regions have registered as counterpart countries and regions. In the run up to the Games, various activities are already taking place between the Host Towns and these counterpart countries and regions, such as exchange between children and Olympians and Paralympians.

As well as the regular Host Towns, there are also: "'Arigato' Host Towns for Supporting Reconstruction" that link areas that suffered damage in the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and countries and regions that supported disaster-hit areas; "Host Towns of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society" that mainly use interaction with Paralympians to promote universal design town planning and a barrier free mindset; and "'Tadaima • Okaeri' Host Towns for welcoming the athletes after the Games" that will interact with athletes after the Games have finished.

MURAYAMA CITY

Murayama City in Yamagata Prefecture is a Host Town for Bulgaria and in 2017 held Japan's first pre-Games training camp for the Bulgarian rhythmic gymnastics national team. The same team has been welcomed to Murayama each year since. In between training sessions, athletes and staff enjoyed experiencing Japanese culture such as the tea ceremony and going cherry picking, cherries being a local specialty. They also visited elementary schools in the area and held a joint training session with a local junior high school rhythmic gymnastics club. Around 2,000 local residents and others come to watch every time the team holds a public gymnastics competition. There is a wide variety of other projects underway too, such as camp support by local volunteers and anti-doping training for athletes and staff.

Bulgaria's rhythmic gymnastics team in action at Murayama City, Yamagata Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Murayama City

MISHIMA VILLAGE

The village of Mishima is on a small island in Kagoshima Prefecture and is connected with Guinea as a "'Tadaima • Okaeri' Host Town for welcoming the athletes after the Games." Cultural exchange between Mishima and Guinea started in 1994 when the world-famous Guinean djembe player Mamady Keïta visited the village and taught local children how to play the

Mamady Keïta (center) playing djembe with children in Mishima Village, Kagoshima Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Mishima Village

instrument (a type of drum from West Africa). Various exchange activities have continued since then, including inviting Mamady to hold workshops in Mishima and visits by local children to Guinea. In August 2019, to coincide with the Seventh Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD), children from Mamady's hometown visited Japan, held joint performances, and were invited to visit Mishima.

IITATE VILLAGE

The village of Iitate, Fukushima Prefecture, which was struck by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, is an 'Arigato' Host Town for Supporting Reconstruction, partnered with Laos. Prior to the disasters, exchange between Iitate and Laos started when Iitate had supported the construction of a junior high school in the Laos village of Dong Nyai. In September 2019, the Laos Paralympic swimming team staged a training camp in Iitate, using the indoor swimming pool of a local junior high school for their practice. During breaks between training sessions, the team observed classes and interacted with students over lunch breaks.


Para athletes from Laos with junior high school students in Iitate Village, Fukushima Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Iitate Village

UBE CITY

The city of Ube in Yamaguchi Prefecture has been designated a "Leading Host Town of a Harmonious and Inclusive Society," a place which aims to create a coexistent society where anyone can live life to the fullest. The city started its own project in which ten junior high and high school students were designated "Ube City Harmonious and Inclusive Society Town Junior Supporters." These children gather information on local events related to the realization of a coexistent society, then communicate that information. In December 2019, the city also invited track and field athletes from its Host Town counterpart of Spain, and also swimming and wheelchair basketball para-athletes from Madagascar, organizing exchange activities with citizens and elementary, junior high, and high school students through sports and traditional Japanese culture.


Para athletes from Madagascar enjoying calligraphy in Ube City, Yamaguchi Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Ube City

In these ways, Host Towns have interacted with athletes of counterpart countries and regions not only in sports, but also in areas such as music and food. The hope is that the relationships which have been established through these initiatives will continue for a long time even after the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo.

Level Crossings for Deer

The increasing number of deer in some parts of Japan has created collision-avoidance challenges for railway operators
@yume/PIXTA

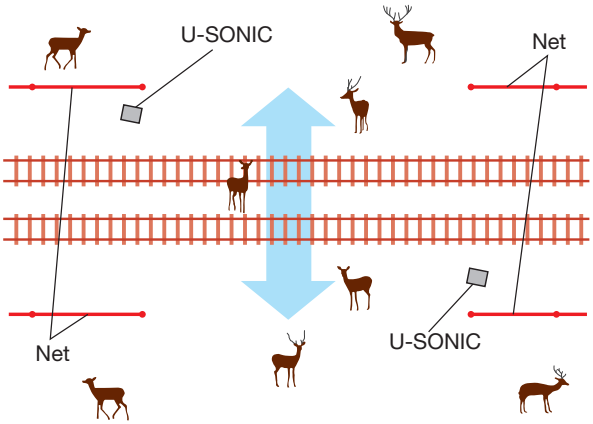
The introduction of a level crossing system for deer has greatly reduced the number of collision accidents involving the animals.

SASAKI TAKASHI

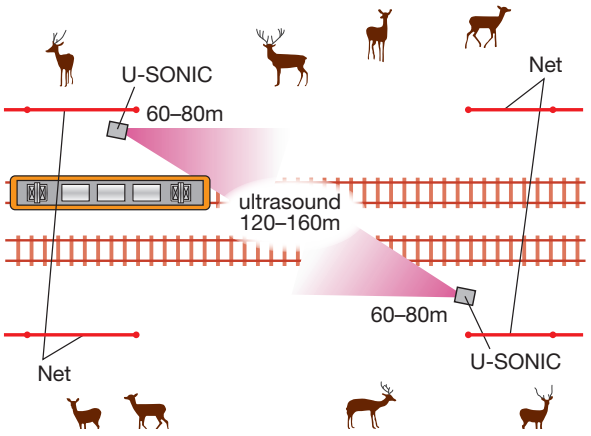
Accidents involving deer are posing a problem for railway services in Japan. As the deer population has increased due to the declining human population in mountain villages including the number of hunters, deer have started to encroach on areas where people live. In response, Kintetsu Railway Co., headquartered in Osaka City and with just over 500 kilometers of service routes covering Osaka, Nara, Kyoto, Mie and Aichi Prefectures, has introduced a Level Crossing System Preventing Deer Collision Accidents. The company aims to enhance the safety of railway services without completely stopping deer from crossing the tracks.

Many accidents involving deer had been occurring in the mountainous areas of the Kintentsu lines, with the number climbing to a peak of 288 in 2015. These accidents forced the company to suspend services for long hours to deal with carcasses and ensure safety. And with the Ise-Shima Summit expected to draw many visitors to the area in 2016, the question of how to decrease the number of deer collision accidents

A deer crossing at night
Photo: Courtesy of Kintetsu Railway



The deer-crossing system outside train operating hours



The deer-crossing system during train operating hours

Figures: Courtesy of Kintetsu Railway

had become a pressing issue.

"Prior to then, we had been taking a variety of measures, such as roping off railways, shining red LED lights to disturb the deer, and installing deer whistles on the trains. These measures produced some results, but were not so effective that they reduced the number of deer crashes to zero," says a Kintetsu Railway Co. engineer in the Nagoya Transportation Department at Railway Headquarters.

To this end, the company carried out a trial aimed at preventing deer collisions for three months starting in the autumn of 2015 in cooperation with Moharatechnica Co., the manufacturer of U-SONIC, an ultrasound-generating device that scares deer, and Kyosan Electric Mfg. Co., a maker of traffic infrastructure equipment. It was then that an employee of Kintetsu came up with an idea.

Images taken by surveillance cameras installed alongside the railways during the trial showed that deer traveled regularly along the same paths and were active only at dusk and dawn. It was also found that deer came out to lick the rails to supplement the iron lacking in their diet. The trial brought to light the difficulty of entirely stopping deer from crossing the lines since the railroads cut through their natural habitat. The Kintetsu employee applied some reverse logic and suggested the idea of letting deer cross the railways safely instead of shutting them out altogether.

The new system was first installed on the Kintetsu Osaka Line close to Higashi-Aoyama Station in May 2016. Kintetsu installed high netting along the line, but left several ten-meter gaps in a number of sections close to the deer trails. The gaps allow deer to pass freely during the safe hours from the last train until the first train. To prevent deer from crossing the line during the evening hours when they are active and the trains are still running, Kintetsu activated the aforementioned U-SONIC devices from sunset until last train and from the first train until the sun has fully risen.

"There had been seventeen collisions involving deer around Higashi-Aoyama the previous year, but the number has declined to almost zero since the level crossing system was installed. Subsequently, we installed the system in other accident-prone areas. We are confident that the system has achieved a positive effect," says the Kintetsu engineer.

The application of the same logic of conventional level crossings to the movement of animals along their trails has been highly evaluated and received the Good Design Award in 2017 from the Japan Institute of Design Promotion. With the system now garnering attention from other railway service operators as well, the deer level crossings, which were created in consideration of how deer behave, is expected to contribute significantly to our co-existence with the creatures.

Nicoleta Oprisan
Photo: Aizawa Tadashi

Ikebana's Potential to Branch Out

Romanian-born Nicoleta Oprisan creates ikebana flower arrangements for a variety of occasions and has received high praise for her craft.

SATO KUMIKO

IKEBANA is a traditional Japanese art form where emotion is created by arranging flowers, leaves, branches, and sometimes materials other than plants in a vase. Originating as Buddhist floral offerings, traditional flower arrangement was said to have been established by monks during the middle of the fourteenth century and a multitude of schools were born from differences in style and technique. The Sogetsu School of Ikebana, founded in 1927 by Teshigahara Sofu and following a novel and unrestricted style, is one of the many schools that represent ikebana today.

Nicoleta Oprisan is a certified Sogetsu School instructor, and works as a Japanese ikebana artist based in Tokyo. After graduating from the University of Bucharest with a degree in Japanese and English Linguistics she pursued her career further by coming to Tokyo. Here she studied Japanese as a post-graduate at Gakushuin Women's College. It was at this time that she saw arranged ikebana at Sogetsu Kaikan, the hub of the Sogetsu School in Akasaka, Tokyo, and was highly impressed. Following her graduation she looked a step further and completed her MA in Mass Communications (Leicester University), a skill she finds very useful when arranging flowers—expressing emotion with the power of art.

Nicoleta says, "My grandmother always decorated our home with flowers, but ikebana is quite different from Western flower arrangement, which is created in an orderly form using multicolored flowers. In ikebana, even a single flower or branch can become a powerful expression. I greatly admired how vases with historical value were given a new life by being used to create new ikebana artworks."

Later, she traveled around the world with her family, living in different countries until finally returning to Japan in 2007. She then enrolled in classes at the Sogetsu School. "I managed to enter my own world when I engaged with flowers during practice. I enjoyed the artistic tension borne from this zen-like

moment," says Nicoleta.

Her talent was demonstrated not long after becoming a pupil, and Nicoleta was elevated to instructor after only two years. She was then given the name "Kōsei" as an alias to work as a traditional Japanese ikebana artist. This name incorporates Nicoleta's feelings towards ikebana as the name is made from combining the Japanese characters for aroma and purity.

Nicoleta uses her skills in a wide variety of ways. She sometimes works on large ikebana installations that are more than two meters high, for various event venues, commercial facilities and concert stages, for example. For a Valentine's Day seasonal window display in February, she created a large heart-shaped arrangement accompanied by seasonal flowers making use of the characteristic sturdiness and flexibility of bamboo. She also created an arrangement for a hotel using autumn leaves of enkianthus perulatus alongside branches with streamlined shapes. This was highly praised by visitors, who said they could almost hear the sound of the wind through her work.

Nicoleta says, "Even though it takes about two hours to make such arrangements, it takes more than two weeks for the preparations, starting with sketches. I strive to create something that is suitable for each occasion, something that will leave a lasting impression on the people who see it."

However, ikebana that uses fresh flowers can only last for about a week. Founding 5 Senses K.K. in 2015, Nicoleta began creating textile designs with motifs based on her own ikebana arrangements to allow her works to last longer. She has also developed original perfumes inspired by the fragrant essence of her creations; the lingering scents of flower materials. Her clothing range and perfumes are sold on 5 Senses online store. She hopes to have her own brand shop in the future to emulate the 5 Senses concept, by showcasing the beauty of ikebana. She speaks of her aspirations, saying, "I want to share the importance of nature through ikebana especially nowadays when there seems to be very little time for us to 'stop and smell the flowers.'"

Ikebana arrangements by Nicoleta Oprisan
Photos: Courtesy of Nicoleta Oprisan

Making Connections through Tap Dance

Tap dancer Lily brings cheer to people of all ages through his classes, workshops and performances.

SAWAJI OSAMU

Tap dancer Lily in his Tokyo studio
Photo: Itabashi Yuichi

TAP dancing is a type of dance in which performers strike out a rhythm on the floor wearing shoes fitted with metal "taps" on the heel and toe. It is a highly improvisatory style of dance, combining a variety of steps such as the "stomp," in which the performer steps with the entire shoe, and the "heel," where the dancer taps with the heel of the shoe while keeping the toe on the floor. It is said that various dances that trace their roots to Africa and Europe were combined in the United States to create tap dancing around the middle of the eighteenth century, and by the twentieth century the dance form had spread throughout the world via the stage and movies.

Tap dancer Lily, who is based in Tokyo and is active in Japan and abroad, says, "The charm of tap dancing is the fact that it is both dance and music. The timbre of this music depends on the steps. The dancer becomes an instrument."

Born and raised in Okayama Prefecture, Lily became interested in tap dancing

A chair tap dance workshop in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture
Photo: Courtesy of Tap Dance Company Freiheit

Tap shoes
Photo: Itabashi Yuichi

after watching the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympics on TV as a junior high school student. He was inspired by the powerful performance of the Australian dance team as they performed in the packed stadium.

After graduating high school and entering a university in Tokyo, he began tap dancing and instantly became enthralled. Seeing a performance by the internationally-active Japanese dancer Kumagai Kazunori increased Lily's passion for dance. He was drawn in by the free and unrestricted dancing of Kumagai's performance as he moved with ever-changing steps to match the mood of the venue and the performance of the various instruments. In his second year at university, Lily started his own dance group called Freiheit, which means "freedom" or "liberty" in German, gaining stage experience while learning more about dance. Lily had studied to become a professor, researching regional revitalization, but in his fourth year at university, he decided to embark on a path to become a professional dancer.

He says, "I thought tap dancing was a worthy cause for my life. I felt like there was the potential to contribute to society while interacting with various people through dance."

After graduating from university, Lily visited New York, the home of tap dancing, many times, earnestly learning about dance techniques and history under many instructors. Soon, he was able to perform at famous clubs and live music clubs in Harlem and Broadway, and received great acclaim there. He also expanded his range of activities in Japan, collaboratively performing with a variety of artists, appearing at fashion shows and hotel parties, and more, while also teaching dance at his own studio and at universities.

While doing so, the Great East Japan Earthquake struck Japan in 2011. Lily offered his support by clearing debris in affected areas together with his university students, and after receiving requests to create an opportunity for exercise for the affected people living in shelters and temporary housing, he hosted a popular chair tap dancing workshop that anyone could enjoy while seated, in Kesennuma City, Miyagi Prefecture. He has visited temporary housing, community centers, elementary schools and other venues in Kesennuma City every year since then, teaching chair tap dancing to more than 500 people in approximately thirty locations so far. At the workshops, he helps participants to easily communicate with one another by having them dance while divided into small groups and using familiar folk songs for music.

Lily says, "I have heard from many people that they have become more cheerful through moving their bodies and talking with other people. I will continue these activities while drawing close to the earthquake victims."

Lily is also engaged in support activities in areas affected by the Kumamoto Earthquake of 2016 and the Heavy Rain Event in Western Japan of 2018, holding dance workshops in many locations, such as elementary and junior high schools, and facilities for persons with disabilities and senior citizens. Teaching more and more students at universities in Tokyo and his own studio, he is passing on the joy of tap dancing to more than 300 people, from age 3 to 80, including students from Europe and other parts of Asia.

"I believe that tap dancing has the power to connect people and bring about happiness. I want to expand my activities to other countries in Asia where tap dancing isn't so well known," says Lily.

Video by Tanaka Satoshi

A *maneki-neko* themed streetcar on the Setagaya Line

Tokyo Tramway Beckons Day Trippers

The Setagaya Line

One of Tokyo's last remaining tramways takes passengers on a fun ride through a part of the city where a taste of the good old days is never far away.

SAWAJI OSAMU

THE Setagaya Line operated by Tokyu Railways is a tramway connecting Sangen-Jaya Station and Shimo-Takaido Station in Tokyo's Setagaya City. Two-carriage trams complete the five-kilometer, ten-station route from end to end in about 17 minutes. Tramways once criss-crossed Tokyo, but services were discontinued one after another as the use of motor vehicles increased.

A view over Setagaya City from Carrot Tower

Today, only the Toden Arakawa Line (Tokyo Sakura Tram) and Setagaya Line remain in operation.

Setagaya City, which was a rural area until the Meiji period (1868-1912), developed into a residential area following the relocation of victims of the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923. The Setagaya Line, which began full-scale operations in 1925, operated as a branch of the Tamagawa Line that connected Shibuya Station and Tamagawa Station (the present Futako-Tamagawa Station in Setagaya City). While the Tamagawa Line between Shibuya and Futako-Tamagawaen was closed in 1969, the line between Sangen-Jaya Station and Shimo-Takaido Station, renamed the Setagaya Line, has continued operations until the present day.

With a population of over 900,000, Setagaya City is a very popular place to live, mainly due to its proximity to central Tokyo, including Shibuya and Shinjuku. The Setagaya Line is characterized by the many housing units and apartments lined up close

All photos: Tanaka Satoshi

Video by Tanaka Satoshi

Maneki-noko beckoning cats at Gotokuji Temple

Shoin-jinja Shrine

to the railroad. While the Setagaya Line is a common method of transportation for commuters going to offices, schools or stores, it is also a convenient, popular service for seeing the sights of Tokyo. There are many places to see along the line, such as historic temples and shrines, and shopping streets with a nostalgic atmosphere.

The starting point of the Setagaya Line is Sangen-Jaya Station. The name of the station literally means three teahouses, originating from the fact that there were three teahouses in the area during the Edo period (1603-1867). Today, the district around the station, where hundreds of restaurants are concentrated, is the busiest of the areas served by the line. Next to the station stands the 27-story Carrot Tower, named for its carrot-colored external walls. The building houses facilities such as a public theater, grocery store and offices, and has an observation deck on the 26th floor. With no nearby high-rises, the deck offers magnificent views over the townscape of Setagaya toward the high-rise areas of Shibuya and Shinjuku and, on clear days, Mount Fuji on the horizon.

One of the most popular sightseeing spots along the Setagaya Line is Gotokuji Temple, located five minutes' walk from Miyanosaka Station. Gotokuji Temple, built in 1480, was a family temple of the Ii Family who ruled the Hikone domain (present day Shiga Prefecture), and whose administrative territory included Setagaya. Legend has it that in the early Edo period, Ii Naotaka, the second lord of the Hikone domain, entered the temple, beckoned by a cat as he passed in front of the temple after hawking. By so doing, he avoided a terrible thunderstorm that suddenly began. This incident is said to be the origin of the *maneki-neko*, or beckoning cat, a good luck charm well known to Japanese people. More than 1,000 maneki-neko cats of sizes large and small are displayed alongside the Shofukuden house on the temple's premises. Due to its popularity on Instagram, the spot attracts many visitors from home and abroad. The Setagaya Line even runs streetcars designed to look like maneki-neko, with interiors fitted with beckoning cat-shaped handrails and cat paw marks on the floor.

One of the famous shrines in the areas served by the line is Shoin-jinja Shrine. Located three minutes' walk from Shoin-jinja-mae Station, the Shrine is dedicated to Yoshida Shoin, a philosopher and educator active around the end of the Edo period. Yoshida educated young people at a private school named Shokasonjuku in Hagi City, Yamaguchi Prefecture. Many of his students played leading roles in the Meiji Restoration in 1868. There is a replica of the Shokasonjuku within the shine's premises.

Many events are held in the area served by the Setagaya Line. One is Boroichi, a two-day flea market that takes place twice a year, in January and December. The flea market, which is said to date back more than 400 years, is held on Boroichi Street, three minutes' walk from Kamimachi Station. More than 700 vendors of used clothes, antiques, toys, daily items, plants, foods and other items set up stall on market days, attracting around 200,000 visitors.

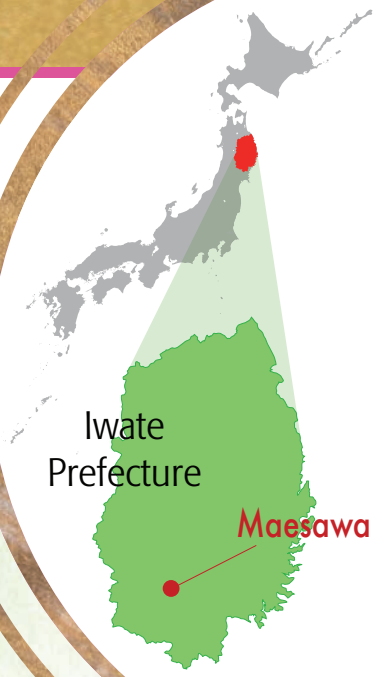
The area also features chic restaurants and cafés offering delicious sweets as well as small shops where friendly staff like to chat with the customers. One attraction of the Setagaya Line is that its ten stations are all located within one kilometer of each other. If you see any shops or locations that draw your interest as you pass, you can hop off at the next station without any worries. A trip on the Setagaya Line helps you feel close to this town and its people.

GI JAPAN PRODUCTS

BEEF

Maesawa Beef

Maesawa Beef is beef obtained from Japanese Black cattle that are both born and raised in Maesawa, Oshu City, Iwate Prefecture. Maesawa Beef breeders and the farmers they supply have developed an integrated system to produce a beef brand with a high market value. The farmers lovingly raise the cattle in small numbers and fatten them using a feed mix that includes a large amount of clean, locally produced rice straw. The cool, stress-free environment in which the cattle are raised further enhances the quality of the beef produced, which is distinguished by its fine marbling and moist, melt-in-the mouth texture.



For more information about Japan's GI products, go to https://gi-act.maff.go.jp/en/