

Tama farmers find relief in new anti-crow device

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Balloons with big painted eyes didn't trick them, decoys did little to throw them off and garbage days were more like feasts thrown in their honor.

But farmers in the Tama district of Tokyo now say they've found salvation in a new method of capturing pesky crows. A device that resembles a hut, which has already proven effective at garbage dumps in the town of Hinode, enables farmers to capture dozens of birds at once.

The crows enter the hut, which measures 2.2 meters high, 3.9 meters wide and 3 meters deep, by folding their wings to fit through a 30-centimeter hole in the roof. They are then trapped, however, as steel rods around the hole obstruct their attempts to get out.

Farmers in Machida and Inagi in the Tama area, where crows have been severely damaging crops, are praising the new hut device, which has reduced the number of crows from nearly 200 to about 25.

According to the Machida agricultural cooperative group, damage to nine farming households in the Onoji district of the city came to about ¥31 million in 1994.

"After a flock flew away from my vegetable field, my crops looked as though they had been carpet bombed," said Shuzen Takahashi, 70, head of the farmers' group. He said crops of potatoes that farmers had planted in the early spring of 1994 were destroyed by crows just before they were to be shipped to market.

After a variety of techniques failed to deter the birds, the farmers turned to the hut device. Under the instruction of Kazuo Nishino, 50, a Tokyo metropolitan government official in charge of bird and animal protection, the farmers were taught to build the hut devices and lure the crows with feed, including dinner leftovers and ripe persimmons. Crow decoys were also used.

The farmers obtained permission from the metropolitan government to kill 100 crows between October 1995 and March of this year. So far, the farmers report that they've already captured nearly 100 crows. They also note that the crows are beginning to attack their fields less frequently. Inspired by this success, pear growers in Inagi and an operator of a trout cultivation farm in Akiruno have also set up anti-crow traps.

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