



Above and right: The secretive Japanese serow, protected but hunted all the same.
Left: Forest destined to be pulp. This area, in northern Okinawa, happens to be the home of the endemic Pryer's woodpecker, population less than 200.



simply stayed put—ie. the migration of the cities to the people—has meant that, for many, nature is no longer familiar.

Despite the urbanisation of the lowlands, much of Japan is mountainous, and some is still relatively wild. There are, for example, more than 6,000 species of flowering plants—more than in the whole of Europe—and dozens of endemic vertebrates. But in a nation newly urbanised and industrialised, man suddenly ceases to harmonise with nature and starts to clash with it, as demonstrated, for example, in the controversies over the Japanese macaques, brown bears, Asiatic black bears and Japanese serows (see *BBC WILDLIFE*, September 1986).

In fact, even for the rural inhabitants, 'wild' nature is now increasingly seen as an enemy to be fought, one that competes with them, one that is not profitable. As a result, the animals mentioned above are regarded

quite simply as pests to be exterminated. In any such conflict, the public identifies with the human 'victims' instead of grasping the situation's ecological implications.

A Nature Conservation Society of Japan was formed as long ago as 1951, but voices questioning the rationale for the ever-spiralling development of industry were few. It took the mercury-poisoning tragedy of Minamata in 1959 to alert the public to the dark side of industry without control, and thereafter legislation began to be introduced. But it wasn't until 1971 that a government environment agency was set up and nature conservation began to become a generally known term, and even now the impact in terms of education has clearly been limited. Biology is taught in schools, but a general understanding of ecological principles is sadly lacking. A survey in 1983 showed that 70 per cent of science and social-studies teachers thought environmental education meant teaching children

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to keep their rooms tidy and not to drop litter.

This is not to say that the public is not interested in animals and birds. It is, but in a curiously polarised fashion. Animals fall into two distinct categories: one is the cute and cuddly, such as the pandas and koalas—which became an instant hit here, and toys, bags, books and pens are covered with their pictures—and the other is the deadly and dangerous. These are the animals such as snakes and bears, which are to be shunned or, preferably, killed—or at least locked away where they will do no one any harm and can be laughed at, as in the horrific bear 'farm' on Hokkaido, where dozens of brown bears are confined in featureless ▷