



Snow on Kaimondai, Ryūkyū

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concrete pits for the entertainment of the paying public.

The conservation movement in Japan has been, on the whole, parochial, with residents' movements formed for specific issues. Mostly, these are anti-development rather than pro-conservation, but there are growing movements involving organic farming, recycling materials other than paper (paper recycling, in fact, is quite common in Japan), and in 1974 a national trust was organised to attempt to save some of the country's more beautiful scenic sites. The number of such groups and their memberships have been growing since the early 1970s, but at a much slower rate than in Europe or North America.

Britain's RSPB can muster half a million members, but the most active group in Japan, the Wild Bird Society, has only about 17,000. And all of the other societies with a similar environmental interest probably only bring the total to about 30,000 — this in a population about twice that of Britain and supposedly made up of inherent nature-lovers.

Hunting associations have about 500,000

members, suggesting that those most active outdoors have a feeling for nature that is not exactly love.

Although there are 27 national parks and many local protected areas, there is little enforcement of protective laws. Many rare and endangered species of animals are collected or hunted, and poaching of alpine plants, for sale as souvenirs, is widespread. And the Japanese government is often responsible for promoting the worst examples of destruction — eg, the current plan for a military airport on Miyake island in the Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park. The area to be destroyed is classified, because of its endemic and endangered birds and marine mammals, under the highest protected status.

In the 1980s, Japan has a very bad international reputation in terms of wildlife conservation, but the nation has shown a remarkable ability to excel in whatever field it chooses. It seems quite possible that new ideas, a new concept of man and nature, could be grafted on to the traditions of natural harmony. The aestheticism and sensitivity of the traditional view could be adapted to a proposition that man, because of his ability to make drastic changes in the environment, must be responsible for protecting the natural world, and Japan, without doubt, could be a world leader in conservation, too, if that was what the people wanted. But to do this, they would have to curb their voracious consumerism, something that would be very hard to do, particularly for the younger generations with

Japanese macaques having a good time in a hot-spring bath built especially for them. In winter, these particular monkeys spend most of the day relaxing in the hot water, popping out only to take advantage of the food left out for them by local people and the Japanese researchers studying their behaviour.

money spilling from their pockets.

Religion and culture have not proven to be a strong basis for healthy conservation values, which in Japan, as in the West, must be learned. But first the schools must develop an environmental sense or ethic, and the extremely conservative younger generation must learn to be interested in something other than making money. □

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Some of the information in this article is taken from In the Shadow of Fujisan: Japan and its wildlife, a book by Jo Stewart-Smith (photographs by Simon McBride), which will be published by Viking/Rainbird on 28 May, price £14.95. This examines the attitudes of the Japanese to wildlife through their art, history, legends and current culture and conservation practices, and is linked to a three-part series, In the Shadow of Fujisan, due to be shown on BBC2 in the summer.