

# poachers thrive despite net ban

this time, thrush flock from their summer nesting grounds in Siberia to winter in the mountains of Gifu, Aichi, Fukui and Toyama prefectures.

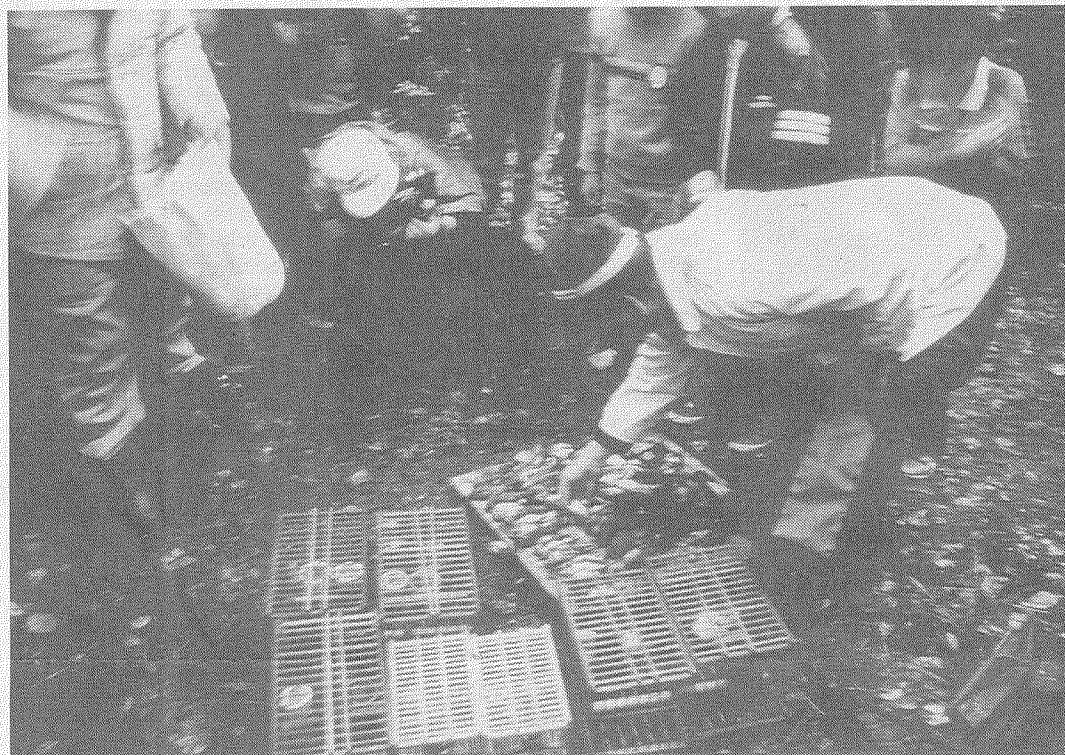
Poachers begin preparations every spring by felling strips of trees on mountain sides on public and private land. When autumn comes, they hang the mist nets vertically on bamboo poles up to three nets high with up to 50 nets at one location.

They use caged thrush or tape recordings of the birds' calls to lure flocks into the nets. Using this method, poachers can catch up to 400 birds at one time. The birds die of strangulation or exhaustion or have their necks broken by the poacher.

The polyester nets measure 1.5 meter by 4 meters and used to sell for ¥1,000. The biggest producer was a fishing net manufacturer in the city of Toyohashi, Aichi Prefecture. The company is now prohibited from manufacturing the nets or selling them domestically or abroad.

It is legal meanwhile to import thrush. Because of the new law, the number imported from Spain is expected to increase. The birds are caught in mist nets that were exported from Japan before the new law went into effect.

Because world supplies of mist nets will last another five years, it will take another



five years for the effects of the new law to be felt, according to society spokeswoman Kimiko Kawamura. In the meantime, the price of thrush at robatayaki restaurants is expected to increase from its present ¥5,000.

In the past, Wild Bird Society members in the city of Gifu received threatening phone calls warning them to "watch their step" or threatening their families.

"Because of the new law, the number of ordinary people poaching thrush will decrease but the number of yakuza poachers will probably increase," says Kawamura. "Some society members have already quit because of the increased danger."

"We will still be going up into the mountains to look for the nets, but we will leave the enforcement of the new law to the police," Kawamura said. "Our most important task now is providing information to the public. We must inform people that they can no longer own mist nets or use them to catch birds."



**CAGED THRUSH** used as lures by poachers in the mountains of Gifu Prefecture are found by members of the Wild Bird Society of Japan along with discarded birds caught in mist nets (top), such as a flycatcher that became entangled on its way from Siberia to Southeast Asia (above). Only the thrush is prized, so others caught by the nets are discarded (left).

WILD BIRD SOCIETY OF JAPAN PHOTOS

