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Tight trade ban wanted for Amami black hares

The secretariat of the Washington Convention has proposed that Amami black hares, believed to live only on Amamioshima and Tokunoshima islands, be given the convention's strictest protection.

It would be the first species that only lives in Japan to come under the convention's control on international trade.

However, the Japanese government is perplexed, saying the animals have never been internationally traded and that it has no data that populations are decreasing.

Hunting Amami black hares is banned and the species is designated as a national natural monument.

The convention is considering a proposed revision, adopted during a meeting of charter members in Kyoto in 1992, aimed at increasing the objectivity of the methods of selecting wild plants and animals subject to the trade ban.

According to the secretariat, the hares should receive the strongest protection because they are concentrated in a very small region. They inhabit an area measuring 5,000 sq. meters, with the majority found in an area of less than 500 sq. meters.



AN AMAMI BLACK HARE, a member of a species unique to Amamioshima and Tokunoshima islands, is shown in this file photo. The species is being considered for protection under an international convention. KYODO PHOTO

In 1976, a survey by the Kagoshima Prefectural Government estimated the population at 6,000. A survey by another organization in 1987 put the number at 3,750.

It is thought that the pro-

posal may have been prompted by a claim by conservationists that the hare's habitat is within the site of a planned golf course. They also fear the animals might be traded because a local superstition

holds that women should eat hare meat for convalescence after childbirth.

The new selection criteria will be adopted during a conference of charter members in October 1994.