

eens' bid to save site



Association of Nature and History, a group of citizens trying to
t of Shishitsuka, Ibaraki Prefecture, survey woodlands.

"We must pass the abundance of nature onto the next generation," said Hiromi Oikawa, a member of a group.

Oikawa said she was delighted to find bamboo and bamboo grass growing in disarray.

"We found small trees and plants between bamboo bushes. I was amazed and impressed by their recovery," Oikawa said. "More than 50 kinds of plants are now growing in the woodland."

To raise awareness of the importance of satoyama and to create a network of activities throughout the country, the group recently held a symposium here. It drew about 200 people from across the country.

At the gathering, experts stressed the importance of the role of satoyama. Toshi-

noru Shigematsu, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Osaka Prefecture, said woodland management is not only effective for conserving wild habitat, but also for promoting broader environmental understanding.

"In cities of concrete buildings, people are seeking lifestyles closer to nature," Shigematsu said. "To reinforce the point that people are dependent on nature, they should not only enjoy it by viewing it, but by participating in managing and conserving the natural environment."

Makoto Numata, chairman of the Nature Conservation Society of Japan, said a copse is an ideal place for educating children about the environment.

Japanese schools often use garden plants to study nature, but they should go out into fields closer to real nature, Numata said.

The importance of preserving satoyama has yet to be understood by authorities and landowners, experts said.

A large-scale business park in Shishitsuka Ohike is being planned by the Tsuchiura and Tsukuba municipal governments.

Although the project is still in the planning stage, Tsuchiura is now conducting a feasibility study and approaching landowners for possible expropriation, according to an official in charge of municipal development.

Oikawa is disappointed that no city officials attended the meeting, even though the group invited them.

"We wanted the symposium to serve as a forum for citizens and city officials to seek ways to preserve the environment," Oikawa said.

"I know the government has spent a lot of time and money drawing up development plans, but it should have the courage to review them once it realizes the place is abundant in nature," she said.

The Tsuchiura official said the city recognizes the virtue of preserving Ohike's natural environment, but the city needs a stronger call for conservation from landowners and the assembly to review the whole plan.

Shigematsu says that although it always seems impossible to overturn government development projects, it may be a good time to challenge that practice as more people start to question the meaning of development after the bursting of the "bubble economy."