

Marten irks shrine by nesting in roof

KITAKYUSHU (Kyodo) A marten has been troubling Sumiyoshi Shrine in Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture, by inhabiting a garret of the shrine's main building, a national treasure, and making holes in its roof, the chief priest said Friday.

A hole of 10 cm in diameter was found late last year in the main building's roof, which is thatched with layers of cypress bark, according to the priest, Nobuhiko Okamoto.

Assuming that some animal had made the hole, the shrine took measures such as placing medicine to drive away cats around the hole and covering it with cypress bark, only to see a new hole surface, the priest said.

Okamoto found a marten when he was about to photograph the hole earlier this month and took its picture.

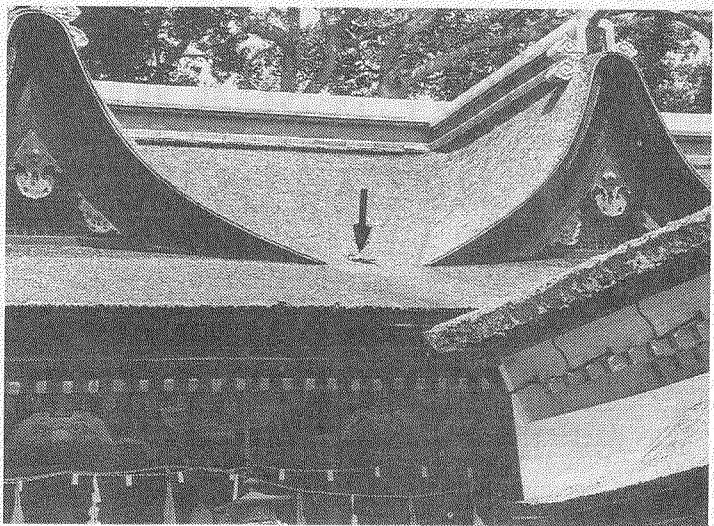
"I guess the marten has somehow entered the garret and been building a nest," Okamoto said.

Martens, or "ten" in Japanese, are agile mammals covered with thick, bushy tails. The species seen in Japan is mostly 38 to 58 cm in length, with a 15 to 30 cm-long tail and weighs 1 to 2.4 kg. It usually nests in a hollow tree or a cave.

Okamoto has been asking the local municipal board of education since December to repair the roof. He intends to ask the Yamaguchi Prefectural Board of Education and the Cultural Affairs Agency to take measures to protect the shrine, which is designated a national treasure, he said.



A MARTEN pops its head out of a hole the animal apparently made in the roof of the main building of Sumiyoshi Shrine in Shimonoseki, Yamaguchi Prefecture. NOBUHIKO OKAMOTO PHOTO



AN ARROW points to the hole in the lower part of the roof.

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