

Harmony with the natural order

A wild buck wandered into an elementary school in Hadano, Kanagawa Prefecture. Because it had antlers and was wounded, wildlife protection officials judged it was dangerous and stabbed it to death. This incident occurred on Dec. 1, the start of this year's hunting season for deer, *tanuki* raccoon dogs, foxes and other game. The deer was bleeding in the face, apparently wounded with a shotgun.

Deer numbers have risen in recent years and that has caused many problems in various areas. On Kinkazan Island off the Oshika Peninsula in Miyagi Prefecture, hungry Japanese deer ravaged Japanese beech saplings in a natural forest; as the area subsequently changed to grassland, older beech trees were ex-

posed to the wind, and hundreds of trees have been uprooted.

Japanese deer are eating away grasslands, forests, orchards and other resources across the nation. The damage has been particularly severe in Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture.

It was reported that the song of the bush warbler could not be heard early this summer. The deer had destroyed the bushes which are the bird's favored habitat; as a result, the caterpillars that bush warblers normally feed on were unusually abundant.

To the disappointment of many sightseers, deer ate up all the *nikko kisuge*, day lilies that are seen in marshy areas in Nikko and other highlands in central and northern Japan. They have devastated fir trees, and started to damage even Japanese

larch trees—which they had not done before.

Residents of Nikko have racked their brains to design defenses. They have put up protective nets around fir trees, and hung women's hair to guard flower gardens since deer shy away from the human scent. But the effect wears off when it rains.

In the olden times, when Enomoto (Takara) Kikaku, a disciple of the famous 17th century *haiku* poet Matsuo Basho, was traveling along the Kiso Road, central Japan, he heard that people there had been experiencing difficulties with foxes tearing up their fields and eating their melons.

Kikaku posted a poem in a field. It translates roughly as "Is it foxes that eat away the fruits that are made with part of their own name? It's a

surprise." Thereafter the foxes are said to have stopped coming to the fields.

Indeed, the right-hand side radical of the character for fox is the very character for melon.

An old-style *senryu* (satirical *haiku*) later said: "A good poem ending with an exclamatory tone succeeded in ending the foxes' visits."

Unfortunately, today's deer seem to lack the poetic bent of yesterday's foxes. Tochigi Prefecture has already planned to eliminate 1,000 deer as pests this fiscal year. The fact is that when animals are allowed to multiply, they cause damage to forests and agriculture.

It is difficult to hold plants and animals in equilibrium, but it will be necessary to devise ways in which to do so. (Asahi Shimbun, Dec. 3)

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