

Summer Blues

The problem with holidays is that any benefit one open reaps in the form of relaxation, refreshment of mind any body and so on, is quickly dissipated on one's return. While I was swanning it up on a beach off the coast of Queensland, the forces of nature were working on the vegetable plot back home. Four beige bantam-sized eggs nestling in the onion patch are evidence that the jungle, now strangling the place, is a welcome have for birds looking for somewhere safe to lay their eggs. Or are they birds? Could be snakes, 'cause snakes lay eggs around this time of year too. Grey feathers around nest seem to indicate bird probably *yamadori* (mountain bird or wood pigeon, I call it). Anyway when I went to check a days later, the eggs had vanished – predator crows no doubt. The *yamadori* is quite a brave little bird. It's partial to snake snacks and its way of getting hold of these delicacies is quite unique. When it spies what it supposes is a hungry snake, it alights nearby and pretends, by contracting itself, to be a poor helpless fledgling that's fallen out of its nest. Snake sidles up and thinks bird would make change from usual frog menu but this one looks too big to swallow in one go. Construction is the answer. So it winds itself around the helpless *yamadori*. The *yamadori* acts out its role of victim perfectly, squawking pathetically and then going limp pretending dead. Snake meanwhile coiled completely around the inert bird thinks he has his meal in the bag. A moment to relax. The *yamadori* calculating the moment suddenly puffs itself up and swells with such force that the snake is shattered into pieces – these the *yamadori* eats at leisure.

The warmer weather has activated not only wild life but hikers as well. There are town people who suddenly take it upon themselves to don

in all sorts of Alpine gear and flock in mountains in search of ‘nature’. In reality they leave an ugly trail of debris behind them; polystyrene foam *bento* boxes, aluminium cans, plastic bags – well you know, the familiar litter trail that leads to and from every scenic spot in this country. The ‘*gomi*’ comes in all varieties and types, one never knows.

Imagine a clear sunny morning. One is walking along a familiar trail through a dappled forest, dogs cavorting ahead thrilled with the lingering overnight scent of foxes, weasels, squirrels, wild boar, and other birds and beasts. There on a sandy bank beside a creek is an old *futon*. Disgusting what people will dump in the middle of the mountain. Croak of frog is heard under *futon*, dogs sniff around waiting to pounce. Lift *futon* gingerly and peek underneath. Horror of horrors, a human head. One immediately drops dead in shock. No this didn’t happen to me but it might have. Instead of me a family of innocent hikers were the victims of this scenario in an area I often walk the dogs. At first they naturally assumed it was part of a corpse but since the head began to mumble (the mouth being gagged), they realised there must be a body somewhere underneath. What chaos must have ensued. Mother flying down mountain in search of help, father trying frantically to dig out body with bare hands, child no doubt disappointed at not finding the frog as he had hoped, only an old head. In a short space of time the mountain was seething with patrol cars, ambulances and helicopters, great show for police, great scoop for the press.

Turns out the old man had been abducted by three men in Tottori and brought all the way to Nose by car. (You’d have thought with all those vast expanses of sand dunes in Tottori they’d have been able to find better spaces nearer by). But for some weird and wonderful reason they picked Nose to do the dirty deed. Arriving at crack of dawn, they dug a deep hole. Putting the trussed up oldie in, they weighed him down with timbers and rocks then covered these with earth. Finally they threw an old *futon* over his head and left. Motive? Money of course. The whole case

had all the good old-fashioned ingredients: jealousy, greed and insurance money as an incentive. Was it attempted murder or just intimidation? Whatever it was they botched it up and like all good criminals in Japan they gave themselves up to the police once the whole affair was splashed across telly screens nationwide. But if the family hadn't found him in the late afternoon as they did, it certainly would have been murder. I still think nature's way of dealing with victims is far more ingenious and professional all round.

Elizabeth Oliver

Rain Forests of Sarawak

How much do you really know about rain forest destruction and its effect on our world? Come and learn more about this environmental concern with Beth Lischeron. You will have a chance to experience for yourself the beauty of the rainforest and the emotions of its inhabitants through Ms. Lischeron's slide show and narration.

You are invited to the Frontier Club at Osaka International House (near Kintetsu Line's Uehonmachi Station and Tanimachi and Sennichimae Lines' Tanimachi 9-chome Station) on Saturday, July 11 from 6:00PM to 10:00PM to participate in Ms. Lischeron's presentation. (The presentation will begin at 6:30.) Admission is ¥1,000 per person.

Although, July is a busy time for everyone, please join us for this very worthwhile evening together. JET programme participants could use this opportunity together to learn about Japan's role in protecting the world's environment and as a "Sayonara" gathering those of us who will not be renewing our contracts. For information, call Christine at (0734)-31-4344 or (0734)-25-4529.

Garden Centres

Kobe

Meikoen: 078-913-2131, 9:30-18:30

Large centre stocking many rarities, gooseberries, apricot trees, etc. Located on the border of Kobe and Akashi. Drive west along Route 2 passing Tarumi and turn towards the mountain at Maiko bus station.

Nirakuen: 078-441-2841, 10:00-18:30, cl. Thurs

A large flower/plant shop located next to JR Settsu Motoyama station. Their large selection allows you to get almost anything you want. Friendly service creates a good atmosphere, and simply walking among the many plants is enjoyable.