

Symbiosis between humans and wild animals in relation to the ordinance banning feeding boars in Kobe city

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1. Background and Purpose

The city of Kobe is surrounded by mountains and sea and thus has very limited flat areas. On March 28, 2002, the city enacted an ordinance banning feeding boars. In recent years in Kobe, population growth and expansion of residential areas have increased the encounters between humans and wild animals, especially boars. The ordinance was enacted as a means to solve the problems, especially to stop the increasing number of boars seen in the urban area because of feeding by humans. This paper reviews the Eastern and Western environmental thoughts which have influenced the Japanese people's views on animals, and the historical relationships between humans and boars. The purpose of the paper is to find the appropriate relationship between humans and wild animals such as boars through the case study in Kobe. The paper also aims to find out whether the ordinance has improved the relationship between humans and wild animals.

2. Field Studies

Field studies were conducted from September to December in 2009 in Higashinada ward of Kobe and in watershed areas of the Tenjo River. The studies were basically explorative and conducted about one hundred forty times around the areas where boars have been seen according to interviews with local residents. In addition, a survey on local residents' attitude toward animals was conducted through questionnaires. Changes in the areas where boars have appeared are compared with the surveys that the author conducted in 2000 and 2001. Changes in the natural environment of the areas are also compared with aerial photographs taken in 1948, 1949, 1964, 2001 and related maps.

3. Findings

Fields studies in watershed areas of the Tenjo River found out that there are boars which do not go back into the mountain at night and stay in the riverbed because of the food provided by local residents. It was also found out that many local residents interact with boars on a daily basis and some are even able to distinguish individual boars. The questionnaires to the local residents found that forty-one per cent answered that boars are adorable but only ten per cent answered that they like to see boars in the town. This indicates that although people have a favorable attitude toward boars, it does not necessarily mean people want them around. Seventy-five per cent of those who answered the questionnaires were aware of the ordinance, and the number of boars seen has decreased between 2000-2001 and 2009. In addition, the condition of garbage collections sites (possible feeding sites) were improved after the ordinance was enacted. Therefore, it can be said that the ordinance has helped to improve the situation. The questionnaire also found that people who have lived in Kobe a long time tend to be more tolerant to boars than those who have lived in Kobe in a short time.

It is people's attitude and behavior that determine whether boars are destructive or not. Surveys of the local residents found that there are many different perceptions of boars: an animal that needs protection; hunting target; meat; and a deity. In order to avoid problems and live together with wild animals, it is necessary that humans possess a certain level of knowledge about the animals and behave accordingly. Throughout history, boars have been exploited by humans. Thus, it may seem difficult to live with them in harmony, but the case study in Kobe suggests that efforts can improve the situation. Symbiosis between human and wild animals requires sufficient time, adjustments according to cultural and geographical background, and above all, efforts not to eliminate the animals, but to live in harmony with them.