



BEARS, FORESTS AND PEOPLE:

English Edition I

THE STORY OF THE JAPAN BEAR & FOREST SOCIETY

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Japanese version of Bears, Forests and People

When water from natural forests are gone
All industry and towns are gone
Our lives are deeply supported by forests
Let's make Japan a nature conservation country
If not we can't live through the 21st century
Let's pass down to the next generation
Ample forest where bears live.



The JBFS was awarded a special prize from the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in March, 2008.

Love is expressed by practice rather than words.

Mother Teresa



Introduction

Japanese black bears (called Tsukinowa-guma in Japanese because of a mark like a crescent moon on its chest) are disappearing.

In the year 1992, a female student brought me a newspaper article announcing Japanese black bears are in danger of extinction. We knew from the article that Japanese forests in remote mountain areas (“Okuyama” in Japanese) were largely being devastated.

Since the bears were losing their feeding places, they were coming down to villages in a starving state. Bears and other large wild animals were being killed as harmful beasts. Middle school students stood up to save bears from destruction.

We realized it is not only bears but all animals including humans that are going to decline with forests disappearing.

“We want to live to the end of our lives.”

Students started to act for environmental protection and worked very hard to sustain it.

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Chapter 1: Prologue

The Japan Bear and Forest Society (the JBFS) is a national conservation organization. We have chosen the bear as a symbol of our association and are acting eagerly to maintain rich forests. In Japanese natural forests there live a variety of animals from tiny bacteria through big animals such as bears, monkeys and wild boars.

I was born in Amagasaki City and was brought up in Kobe, and I never dreamed of working on this kind of activity when I was younger. I was a science teacher in public schools. In 1992, I was teaching at Muko-Higashi Junior High School in Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture. In January of that year, first grade students were studying about “The world of animals”. As the unit came close to an end, I assigned students to study the topic by themselves. One girl turned in her report with a newspaper article. At first sight, I ignored it and put it aside because I didn’t feel like reading it.

In the newspaper article there was a picture of two hunters carrying on their shoulders a thin bear they had shot and killed, that showed how heart aching a story this article would be. I decided to read only her report. From her report, I understood how seriously she has taken this problem.

I felt like writing a response to her with my red pen but at that point I realized I must read the article first. I reached for the article and cautiously began reading.

Headline: *We Hate this Mountain. No Food, No Trees. We can't Sleep. We Go Down to the Village in Winter for Food, and are Shot and Killed. Japanese black bears are crying out against Environmental Destruction.*

I began reading and was deeply shocked to realize that even I, a science teacher, knew nothing about how Japanese forests and animals are in crisis.



A newspaper article that triggered the active movement for conserving bears (1992)

According to the article, the national policy of expansive afforestation with plantation

forests of Japanese cedar and Hinoki cypress enacted after World War 2, has changed a huge part of the deep forest in remote mountain areas of Japan into plantation forest.

If we look down from an airplane, we can see green mountain ranges. I knew that all the civilizations which had cut down all of their trees had perished. But as far as I could see, there was still much large forest remaining, so I was relieved that Japanese civilization would continue for the time being. I couldn't believe that much of the green was not natural forests but was in fact plantation forests.

Before the forests were changed to plantations, Japan's deep forests were filled with wild animals. Not only bears but all varieties of animals were living together in the natural forests of broadleaf trees such as beech, oak and evergreen trees. In this forest, depending upon the season, there was plenty of food for animals: flowers, leaves, nuts and berries, as well as forest undergrowth and many kinds of insects.

However, in recent years, the natural forests have been cut down and conifers like Japanese cedar and Hinoki cypress, which are useful to humans, were planted. Some animals lost their places to sleep because trees with large holes were cut down. Others lost food because the leaves of cedar and cypress are too bitter to eat, and they don't produce nuts or berries which animals, like bears, eat. For all these reasons animals couldn't endure hunger and as a result they came down to villages.



Now, Japanese remote mountain areas are empty. This extraordinary phenomenon which never occurred before is the beginning of extinction. However, people in villages took the opposite view and misunderstood that there are too many animals in the forests. People said their agricultural products were damaged and they started killing animals with guns and traps not only for hunting but as harmful beasts.

When this type of problem occurs, extinction begins with the largest animals. Japanese black bear became the first one. In Kyushu Island, where expansive afforestation started, bears are already gone. In Shikoku Island, only a small number (less than 20) remains. With some still remaining, many people feel relieved that they are not extinct yet. But for these types of animals, when it comes less than 100, extinction begins with inbreeding. In Shikoku Island



extinction of black bears is most likely to come.

There are many examples of where a species has gone extinct in one place and where efforts have been made to revive them in that area by bringing the same type of animal from elsewhere, but they have been unsuccessful. In fact, many such trials have been done all over the world. When an animal has become extinct in one place, they rarely come back.

In Hyogo Prefecture, it was estimated that in 1992, 60 Japanese black bears remained. In the newspaper article, it was said that they were in danger of extinction. The percentage of plantation forest in all of Hyogo Prefecture, where we live, was 42%. But percentage of plantation forest where wild animals lived, ranged from 60-80%. It is said that extinctions begin when the percentage of plantation forest is over 40%. I was amazed to know that bears were still there.



Almost all the animals and plants, except cedar and cypress, are gone from Japanese remote mountain areas. I thought students should know what a critical condition Japanese forests are in, so I printed the article and student's report in our school newsletter "Science News" and next day took it to class.

Five minutes before the class was over, I passed out the paper. The classroom became silent and all the students were reading it ardently. I think they knew for the first time in their life how critical the situation was for Japanese animals.

When all the students finished reading, one male student shouted out "This is horrible." I thought this issue was over and at the same time the bell rang to announce the class was over.

After the class, when I was walking down the hallway, several boys came with serious looks on their faces, "Bears are going extinct. That's too sad. Let's help them." I was surprised to hear such a thing and responded: "You know how busy I am? People of nature conservation groups will take care of such a problem, so you can just rely on them." At that point, I believed from the bottom of my heart that there was such a group in Japan, which works on such problems.

From the next day I started reading newspapers carefully. I believed all newspapers



would write a special feature article reporting that “Japanese remote mountain areas are in a critical condition” and many comments would be sent by readers. But the original article ended with no response and there were no new related articles. There were no groups in Japan working on these problems.

My students kept asking me “Did anyone say let’s save bears?” Every time I was asked, it became difficult for me to answer and gradually I felt more stressed.

Chapter 2: We want to live to the end of our lives.

“We want to live to the end of our lives.

We doubt if adults really love us and care about our future.”

At that time, I would say to my students, “Listen, everyone. If you believe that something is true, voice that belief even if you are all alone. This country will never get better unless those with courage and a strong sense of justice increase and take action. I am teaching seriously, hoping that all of you will grow to be such persons.”

But now the remote forests are in a disastrous condition. In my modern ecology classes, I would teach my students: “The varieties of animals and plants are so closely interrelated that nature exists in a perfect balance. Nature conservation means keeping such biodiversity.” I knew the seriousness of the bear issue more than anyone else. The students were watching how I would act next. If I avoided this problem, what I had said to the students would be regarded as a lie. No one had raised a voice to protest the situation. What should I do?

I had a negative image of the nature conservation activity back then, and I never wanted to join such groups. I began to struggle myself. Thoughts went through my mind: “I feel sorry if bears are killed and become extinct. But after all they are carnivores, and according to the media, sometimes they attack humans. So their extinction cannot be helped.”

One day I went to the school library and looked at a book called “Japanese Black Bear Diary”. The book was written by Mr. Masayoshi Miyazawa of Nagano, in an attempt to let people know the real nature of bears.



He said, “Normally bears inhabit remote forests quietly, and are very awkward contrary to their appearances. A Japanese black bear consumes 99 percent vegetation and 1 percent animals, such as insects and freshwater crabs. They scarcely have the habit of attacking people.”

A few dozen years ago in remote mountain areas in Nagano, where humans would seldom enter, Mr. Miyazawa would spend a whole day, walking past some twenty Japanese black bears. He had met countless bears, and none of them attempted to bother him. He was impressed that a Japanese black bear, bigger and with greater physical strength than human beings, was such a peaceful animal. He became more and more fascinated by the bears, and in later years, lived with 10 bears like a family in his garden which had an area of about 16,500 square meters. Having lived together, he learned the real nature of the bears. He became even respectful towards their gentleness, cleverness, patience, and the deep sense of gratitude they would show to him.



Bears are hunted on a massive scale, and traded for about one million yen per head particularly because of their gall bladders, which are used in traditional Chinese medicines and traded at a price as expensive as gold. Bears are victims but in most cases bears are made out as perpetrators. If bears could read newspapers, they would shed tears of sorrow, I thought. I learned that the ignorance, misunderstanding and unmercifulness of humans are threatening bears to extinction. This is an absolutely horrible fact.

On a humanitarian level, as well as for our nation’s environmental protection, someone had to raise a voice against the situation. Thus I finally made up my mind. As a science teacher who was teaching about nature, I had no choice but to raise a voice to protect bears.

The first thing I did was to show the newspaper article of the killed bear to two science teachers at our school. They recognized that the Japanese remote mountain areas were being devastated. So the three of us gathered in the science room after hours, and formed “The Group for Protecting Wild Japanese Black Bears”.

On the following day, I was finally walking tall to the classroom. When the class was about to end, I told students, “I have something to say about protecting bears that you have been concerned about. As there has been no one acting to save them, I formed “The Group for



Protecting Wild Japanese Black Bears” with my teaching colleagues. I am ready to raise a voice against the crisis.” All the students were staring at me. The subsequent developments were not what I had ever expected to happen.

On the same day, I was doing routine tasks in the teachers’ room, when several students came in looking very serious. One boy said, “Ms. Moriyama, let us join your group for protecting wild Japanese black bears. We have heartache after reading the newspaper article on the poor bear.” He looked pained, holding his chest with his hand. Their action surprised me, as I had never imagined the present day children getting so worried about this kind of issue. I was much moved. However, I declined their participation in my group, because I knew that their joining the group would be interpreted as me agitating the students.

On the next day, the students came to me in groups, each comprising 4 to 5 members. One after another they would announce: “Ms. Moriyama, we have formed ‘The Group for Returning Wildlife to the Mountains’.”

“We have formed ‘The Group for the Resurgence of Japanese Black Bears’.”

“We have formed ‘The Group for Bears’.”



By that time, those who were not my students had already joined the groups. I also learned later that the “Science News” covering the bear protection issue had been circulated to the whole school. In all, 16 bear-protection groups were formed in our school, Muko-Higashi Junior High School.

The students knew from the beginning that this issue also meant the bear issue including forests. In their houses they located books about bears and forests, brought them to school, got together in the science room, and enthusiastically read them to learn about the problem. The more they read and studied, the more they became aware of the sense of crisis:

“Japanese forests and animals are in serious trouble”.

The students acted very quickly. They gathered telephone cards, and, began making calls to the town office of Tajima District in the northern part of Hyogo Prefecture, where bears survive. When the town office staff received the calls asking to stop hunting bears to prevent their extinction, they all responded in anger: “Protecting bears? Which do you think is more



important, bears or people? We won't have anything to do with it!"

At that time, we did not understand why the local people became so angry. We also made calls to the authorized local hunting group, but they responded that their hunting was lawful.

To get over these difficulties, we decided to collect signatures for a petition. The science teachers prepared a petition titled "Urgent Request to Stop Capturing Endangered Japanese Black Bears in Hyogo Prefecture" on which signatures were to be collected.

However, we adults could not be proactive enough, being somewhat shy in spite of knowing that we were taking the right action. We ended up just sending request letters to science teachers in the local schools. A little while later, most of the local science teachers, 70 in number, responded with their signatures in approval of our petition.

However, the students' groups had collected a far greater number of signatures. I asked students, "How can you collect so many signatures each day?" What they were doing made me speechless. They said, "Ms. Moriyama, we are visiting each household in the town." "We stand in front of the station." "We stand in front of the supermarket every day."

I was about to shed tears to know that the so-called present day children were working so hard for something which would bring no physical reward to them. The students strived to collect the supporting signatures because they felt that the innocent wild lives, including those of bears, should not be extinguished by human beings.

Totally confused by the extent of their devotion, I asked the students one day, "Why are all of you working so eagerly?" One boy replied, "Ms. Moriyama, this is an issue not only for bears, but also for us. How many more years do you think we are going to live before we reach the end of our lives? About seventy more years. But seeing today's destruction of nature, it is obvious that we cannot live out our natural life span. We do want to live to the end of our lives." It was indeed a serious outcry of a young student.

Another boy told me with a sad expression: "I doubt if adults really love us children. They would use up all the natural resources within their generation and would not leave anything for us." Being an adult myself, the words hit me hard, so hard that I couldn't reply.



Chapter 3: We shall change society!

It is a very good opportunity to communicate our vision to the Emperor and Empress of Japan when they come here!

The students said to me that we can collect an infinite number of signatures if we have enough time. In spite of their motivations, I suggested to them that it would be better to send these signatures to the office of Hyogo Prefecture.

The 16 leaders of students and I went to the office with the signatures which they collected from their hometown. We asked the authorities to stop planting cedar and cypress for re-afforestation.

Contrary to our opinion, the workers at the Forestry Agency got angry and told us that they would never change their mind and would continue to plant cedar and cypress trees. The students spent 90 minutes trying to prove their point, and said to the authorities, “please do not send the bears to extinction”, but the authorities ignored them.

A professor whom we asked to go with us said that it is not possible for the bears to go extinct and we should not fear about it. This was in contrast to what he had said to us before departure. After hearing this, a reporter who had been collecting information for an article quit writing the article.

At that time in Hyogo Prefecture 30 bears were killed in one year by hunting and as so-called nuisances. It was estimated that 60 bears had survived. We could calculate easily when the bears would become extinct.

I vividly remember the scene, as we all stood at the platform of Sannomiya Station in Kobe in silence. I apologized to the students from the position of a teacher and as an adult human being. It was hard to believe that there were such marvelous young people with good spirits and courage in the world. I thought the students had done a great job to make a big movement on Japanese nature conservation activities. However, the government did not respond to the students’ movement.

I said to them that we should not have come here to visit the government. But they said to me, “It was a good opportunity to visit the government office. We





found out the reality. The negotiation of adults was not fair. We have gained the power for fighting more and more. We will persuade them after researching and studying in the future.”

They made this pledge at the train platform, and subsequently pursued the pledge.

Afterwards, surprisingly, Muko-Higashi Junior High School changed to a school which was recommended by the Ministry of Education because every student had become conscious of the importance of studying to change our current society. Then, the students started to study harder.

Now, the Japanese education system does not function well. People have been blaming schools, teachers, and parents for it. I realized that nobody should be blamed, but in fact, our wealthy society had caused this problem. A wealthy society causes children to not be ambitious.

However, in my experience, once children have ambitions, they start to study harder by themselves. Bullying problems went from my school after the children changed.

The students had not given up studying and were working hard, because it was not only for them, but for creatures which could not raise voices to prevent them from extinction. I noticed that the students could continue to make efforts to achieve their goal even when the goal was a hard one, if the goal was for the benefit of other creatures. Consequently, the students continued to send letters to government administrators, to appeal for protection of wild animals, especially bears, from extinction. However, nobody answered their letters.

At that time, the regional Forestry Agency in Osaka had jurisdiction over forests in Hyogo Prefecture. I visited them to ask about the situation of wild animals in the forests. A sincere officer told me that wild animals in the forests would become extinct in the future, and besides that, we were facing a problem of water shortage now. I asked him why he said that. He said “Over-planted cedar trees in the remote mountain areas and developments in the forests had made the water levels in the rivers drop. Therefore, we built many dams in the mountains, but there is no space to build dams anymore. If we do not have enough rain in a year, we must start to limit water supply. Please prepare for this situation.” We were surprised about this and asked him to release this news to the public, but he refused to.

I said to myself, “if the forest ecosystem is destroyed then also human beings will



disappear”.

In the summer vacation, the representatives of the students, the leader of the parent-teacher association, and three science teachers went to the Environment Agency at Kasumigaseki in Tokyo by Shinkansen express train. We aimed to present our opinions to the authorities that Japan had no system to protect forests and animals. Two officers listened to the energetic speeches by the representatives for about 30 minutes. At last they said that they understood well our opinions, but they advised us that they had no capability to do anything about it and we had to try by ourselves if we wanted to protect forests and animals. We could not believe it.

The officer continued to say that our country started to choose the route, to become extinct, by increasing the number of our population. We wanted to know a suitable number for Japan’s population to survive and coexist with animals. The judgment of the officer was 30 million people living moderately like during the Edo Era when they were living sustainably.

So when changing the direction of Japan towards industrial development, our destiny would be extinction. The total population in Japan at the time was 123 million people.

In that year we had only one hope. The organization of hunters in Hyogo Prefecture said to the press that they would stop hunting Japanese black bears by self-imposed control because of the likelihood of extinction.

We expected the hunters not to hunt bears anymore, but the total number of bears killed decreased only by two from the previous year, and still 25 bears were killed as nuisances.

A student decided to make a direct appeal to Mr. Kaibara, Governor of Hyogo Prefecture at that time. I wrote a letter to Governor Kaibara. He promised an appointment of about 15 minutes. All the staff thought that the appeal would determine the destiny of forests and animals in Japan, so we chose 4 students with special skills, with spirit for protecting things, and the ability to give good speeches. All four were females. They practiced every day and every night after club meetings in the science classroom. When they met the governor on the chosen day, they presented a paper and asked about Japanese black bears in Hyogo Prefecture.

Here are the choices:



1. The bears must be protected as wild animals.
2. The bears have to be left to survive by themselves.
3. No comments.
4. We shall exterminate as many bears as possible.
5. All of the bears will be exterminated.

The governor chose number 1 without hesitation. After a period of silence, because we did not anticipate this answer, we were glad.

The presentation continued for 15 minutes as in the training period. The governor listened and advised that this problem was very difficult because there was a positive side and a negative side. But he explained that he would try to find a solution.

From this moment on, everything has changed gradually. We met many people in authority, and unexpectedly, the person who understood about ecosystems the most was Governor Kaibara. He gave the budget to each government department related to wild animals. But the government officers spent money only on research. We were disappointed because we expected that they would spend money to protect bears.

Research may sound good, but research actually means the following:

- Set out the traps at the places where bears exist and capture them.
- Put under anesthesia.
- Pull out a tooth to determine the age.
- Put a GPS collar around the neck and attach a tag to the ear.

These actions increase the fear of human beings. Researching about bears, we will speed up their extinction. The students felt more pain in their hearts.

The only method for protecting wild animals from extinction is to give them freedom without touching them. In other words, keep a place for coexistence as our ancestor did.

During a busy time of year, we learned that Hyogo Prefecture was to be the host for an event for planting trees. At the event, people plant cedar trees. This event has been held every year in each prefecture and in the same form for 50 years after World War 2. At this time the Emperor and the Empress also plant cedar trees. We thought that it was not good to

plant cedar trees but to plant broad-leaves trees instead.

We wrote a letter to the governor about this matter. The details are as follows:



“There is too much plantation forest of cedar trees in Japan. – Lots of environmental problems are emerging in Japan, not only in Hyogo Prefecture. – We are the first prefecture to change the plantation forests to forests of broad-leaves trees. Then, once we make the change, other prefectures will follow. – So we have great power to influence change. – Please plant broad-leaved trees at the event.”

A newspaper published a story in which: Mr. Kaibara decided to plant 26 kinds of broad-leaved trees instead of planting cedar trees. – The Emperor and the Empress will also plant broad-leaved trees.

This was a very quick change of action. The students were so glad that they wanted to join this event. I wrote a letter to the governor again. We received 5 invited tickets and attended the event in Muraoka town in Hyogo Prefecture.

One student said to me that it was a very good chance to broadcast our opinion to the whole country through the media, because the Emperor and the Empress would visit there.

Bears in Hyogo Prefecture move to and from other prefectures: to the west Tottori & Okayama Prefecture and to the east Kyoto. Since wild animals are unaware of borders, they might be killed in another prefecture. It was not sufficient to try to protect bears in only one prefecture.

The best solution is to make a movement to preserve through out the entire nation. The students wrote letters, and visited the hotel where the Emperor and the Empress stayed, and delivered the letters via the security guard.

A story about that the students gave a letter to the Emperor and the Empress appeared in the newspaper next day. On the same day, a meeting was held at the Environment Agency. In the past, this authority did not take any action. But two days later the head of the Environment Agency announced to the press that it would be prohibited to hunt Japanese black



bears in Hyogo Prefecture because of the risk of extinction.

They succeeded to stop hunting in Hyogo Prefecture. However, I thought that there was a limitation to act for preserving bears for the students. To protect wild animals in this country, we must try to recover remote mountain areas as a sanctuary. We have to reconstruct the habitat segregation(*1) for coexistence with wildlife as our ancestors did. We must quit hunting and extermination of bears. But it is very difficult for children by themselves to complete this task.

At that time, the students had moved on to high schools. So we decided to wind up the team.

Chapter 4: Plants + Animals = Forests

Animals do not depend on forest. Instead, they help to build them.

After that, I traveled all over Japan and, as a science teacher, and I researched as much as I could on the problems associated with bears. From the Tohoku district to Shimane Prefecture, I visited several prefectures and did surveys in remote areas. Everywhere I went, elders were saying to me, “In the old days, there were no bears around, in fact no animals were near the village. But these days, when it becomes dark, animals come down from the mountains.”

While studying about forests, a question occurred to me: why was Japan so successful in becoming a rich country? My answer was that, until recently, our ancestors had preserved the native broadleaf forests in remote areas.

Such forests provide an abundant flow of water throughout the year. After dripping through fallen leaves, raindrops eventually appear as spring water. After that, they are no longer raindrops, but nutritious water that is ideal for agriculture.

It is tasty, too. This crystal-clear water serves as water resources for cities. It also

¹ * Previously in Japan many human habitats did not encroach above 800 meters. But recently, excess human development has developed in the higher mountainous areas where wild animals used to thrive. To put it simply, there is no more “habitat segregation” and we are losing a vital part of our ecosystem because of our own private desires to live in these areas.



supplies industries, and after flowing to the sea, makes good fishery grounds as it sustains marine ecosystems.

I started to realize that if the Japanese remote areas were left alone in today's state, with their plantation forests and over-development, the country's forests would one by one start to collapse in the future. If that happened, just like the past civilizations, by losing spring waters that sustain all the industries, Japanese civilization will perish.

There may be economic, military or cultural powers in the world, but above all things, I firmly believe that Japan must become an "environmental power" or else this nation will not survive in this century.

Then I took a visit to a virgin forest in Okayama Prefecture inhabited by bears which we named bears' forest (kumamori in Japanese). This kind of native forest is now very rare and exists only in limited areas. I imagined the forest to be dense with plants. But once I entered, I found beautiful woods with plenty of clearings. It was as if a gardener had tended them only yesterday.

The sun's rays came through the broadleaves of beech and mizunara oak and illuminated the forest's floor, and there was brightness. I felt as if I was inside a huge green dome. There were various kinds of trees and shrubs that were unfamiliar to me, and it was a picturesque sight. The ground was filled with moisture and every surface was wet with clear water drops. The rocks were covered with moss. This is what a real forest is like!!

I was awestruck by my first experience of this bears' forest.

As I walked through the forest, it suddenly came to me that animals are not dependent on plants, but they are rather coexisting, relying on each other, and that animals are helping to build these rich forests.



A large animal's path like the one made by bears, brings air and light into the forest. Bears eat nuts from higher branches that they break off, and this action brings light into the forest. In some areas, bears are hated by forestry workers because they peel cedar's bark, so

the workers still trap and kill them. It is said that the bears' action is not known, but maybe they are trying to restore the forest's ecosystem by reducing the number of over-planted cedars. Mr. Kenji Suhara, who has been doing research on Asyuu native forest in Kyoto, says that the bears create tree hollows that after years become hibernation spots for other animals. As well, the bears dig up the soil and help the growth of the trees, and their droppings also fertilize the plants.

Birds spread seeds they have eaten thus ensuring the next generation of plants. When insects collect pollen and nectar, they help to pollinate plants. A forest does not consist of plants alone. I believe that only when both plants and animals participate, can a forest exist!

If we let our wild animals become extinct, then forests will eventually disappear from Japan. If we let bears become extinct in Hyogo Prefecture, then we will lose forever the richest forest.

I also visited one of the vast, abandoned plantation forests in a remote area. From a distance, it appeared to be a beautiful forest with rows of lush, triangular-shaped cedar trees.



But once I stepped inside, it was completely dark. There were no plants growing on the forest floor, as very little sunlight reached the ground all through the year. Much of the topsoil was gone, washed away by rainfall, and the ground was bare. As far as I walked, I could sense no life forms at all. Not even an insect. It was a silent, dead forest.

Here and there, I saw some mudslides. A plantation forest like this cannot be maintained without human care, such as cutting, pruning and thinning. Because the Forestry Agency of Japan only cared about their economic efficiency, vast areas of forests were turned into "cedar fields" in an attempt to control their growth. But unable to manage the vast labor costs of cutting, pruning and thinning, it ended in failure. As a result, vast areas of plantation forests are now abandoned and overgrown.

Unless we do something about it, the country's forests will be ruined. Before it is too late, we must put pressures on the government to change its policy and move towards native forest conservation, and restoration of remote mountain areas, as soon as possible.



But, I could not do it all by myself. If the government was unwilling to work on it, then I would have to seek the help of other organizations. So I asked many of them for aid, but none were willing to help me.

In the spring of 1996, together with some people such as researchers, we held the first assembly at a bear's habitat in Hyogo Prefecture. But unfortunately it was taken over by people who wanted to make profit out of bear-related problems. We were deeply hurt by that, and I finally realized that there is no one who would earnestly devote his or her life for forest conservation of remote areas and wildlife protection.

Even though we are facing a critical problem and endangering our water sources and forests in remote areas, I wondered why the government and everyone else kept ignoring this.

I was wondering such thoughts, when I encountered a book. It was "American Environmental Movement" by Shigeyuki Okajima, and after reading the book, I was totally overwhelmed.

In the United States and Europe these days, large natural conservation groups with several hundred thousand or even over one million members are present, and they are having outstanding success. Indeed, they had succeeded in stopping developments and conserving the natural environment. With the book, I found the way to move forward.

Chapter 5: Since no one was acting, we had to act.

*Rich nature shall be protected by people feeling distressed
at animals' suffering and also by little children.*

Those who protect nature are people who feel distressed at animals suffering, and also children who understand animals' feelings, as well as ordinary people who have gentle hearts. We concluded we should make an association with such people in order to accelerate nature protection in Japan.

Since no one else did, we decided to make a major association for nature protection in Japan. In spring 1997, we established the "Japan Bear and Forest Society". At that time, my



former students had become university students. When I asked them for support they gladly came back again, including many who had appealed directly to the governor of Hyogo Prefecture in 1993. Everybody said “We eventually will succeed, Ms. Moriyama!” They led the association and widened our actions.

I also called for the support of ordinary people, some of whom felt distressed at animals’ suffering.”

There are two reasons why we decided to use the word “bear” in our organization’s name though our target is not only protection of bears. One was that we aimed to conserve and reserve the richest forest for bears to dwell, and the other was we knew that all beings (animals, birds, fishes, and insects) will survive if we reserve the natural forest for the biggest animals, like bears, to live in.

At first, we went to the town that had the most radical ideas about killing bears and we talked to the leaders of the town for many hours. When they showed us their forest, it was terribly devastated. Cedar trees in the plantation forest had fallen down at the top of the mountain in a snowy place and it looked like the place that unholy ghosts dwell.

At night, the local people showed us the situation around their houses. Though no animals appeared in the daylight, many animals were wandering around their houses like a zoo at night time.

The eyes of those animals were flashing here and there. They knew that they would not be shot at night, and they came out of the forest to eat crops in the farms.

The local people were in dire straights because they felt that the Japanese timber industry was collapsing because of inexpensive imported woods. And they felt that agriculture cannot be sustained because animals eat their crops.

“The national government ordered us to plant cedars. It’s all the fault of the state. The failure of national policy is now forcing us into a critical situation,” they cried.

I said, “Everybody, why don’t you plant acorn trees deep in the mountains? Let the animals go back into the forest.”

The leaders of the town were pleased to listen to me.

“We’ve never thought of that! Remember the old days; no animals came out of the mountain while there were acorn trees in the forest.

If animals go back into the forest, we can farm again!”

But soon after that, they said that they were disconsolate.

“But we cannot. We are too old and our town is suffering from depopulation. We do not have money and power to do that.”

So we replied:

“Let us help you. We, the people living in the city can help you.”

We started restoring the natural forest that animals can live in peacefully. We recruited and applied people (students, ordinary citizens, and so on) as volunteers and we planted broadleaf trees that are the natural vegetation in the bears habitat. We planted Japanese chestnuts, Quercus oaks, Sawtooth oaks, Walnuts, Horse chestnuts, Beech trees, with the expectation that the government would start restoring forests and save animals some day. Our slogan is the following:



“Restore the peaceful home forest for the animals, and give peaceful living for the local people”

Mr. Shouzou Higashiyama, the former president of Wakayama Wildlife Preserving Network, helped us as our advisor; he started to plant acorn trees in remote mountain areas.

We were trying such forest action. However eagerly we may try we the human race cannot create the richest forest consisting of various plants and animals. We believe that plants and animals restore ecosystems with minimum human aids.

We are sure that Japanese domestic forestry should be prosperous and sustainable and



that remote mountain areas should be preserved as natural forest and plantation forest should be under 30% of the whole mountain area as our ancestor said.

These days it is said that rural mountain areas are important. Our opinion is the huge remote mountain areas that support all Japanese industries are much more important. Our ancestors preserved these remote mountain areas as they were until about 45 years ago.

Consequently, environmental protection cannot be developed unless people living in the cities, which do not provide water, oxygen and food, raise action to share time and money for the people living in the rural areas which preserve natural forest. It is also necessary that ordinary citizens join an association for nature protection and order the state to protect nature as a public enterprise.

We visited local government and prefectural governments again and again. We also visited the Environment Agency (now called the Ministry of Environment), the Forestry Agency and Parliament repeatedly. We appealed to some bureaucrats and members of the Diet (Japanese parliament) to help the animals and people living in rural areas in miserable conditions and adopt the following suggestions:

1. Stop the expansive afforestation because these forests are causing widespread damage to the environment and agriculture.
2. Thin the plantation forests at public expense to brighten the forest.
3. Take measures to stop agricultural damage by animals at public expense; there should be no killing of the animals as they come out of the mountains, to avoid extinction of wildlife.
4. Restore and preserve natural forests of broadleaf trees in the remote mountain areas that wild animals live in.
5. Make natural forest sanctuaries for the wild animals where hunting and extermination are prohibited in the remote mountain areas. Protection for wild animals is difficult because there is no sanctuary in Japan now.
6. Japanese black bears should be protected as Japanese natural monuments: there are 100,000 Japanese serow protected as Japanese special natural monument while Japanese Black Bears are



under 10,000 and are not natural monuments. They are hunted and exterminated more and more.

Member of the JBFS, a practical nature conservation group, have been appealing for the urgent necessity of protection of remote mountain areas. Our leaders are young people with a sense of mission.

We adults have to teach adolescents to be the leaders in nature protection for all living matter including human beings and financially support their actions.

We are still too small and weak to make the national policy change and to protect and preserve Japanese national forests though we pure and brave JBFS have been making suggestions and impact to the people over many years. We need many full-time staff from now on.

What is worse is that acorn trees are dying as a result of exotic strains of insects that have appeared in Japan from the south because of global warming. The wild animals, the creators of Japanese rich forest, are no longer able to live in the forest and are exterminated as they come out. We the JBFS have to be much bigger and stronger. It is necessary to organize a nature conservation group of a million people in Japan to protect Japanese nature as American and European people do.

I hope that you people who read this today not only understand or agree with us but also make some contribution for protection and conservation of remote mountain areas or joining to our organization of nature conservation group in Japan.

Now, I'm very glad to be working for the JBFS.

I have been protesting what I think is wrong and I have never run away. I'm living with pride and responsibility now.

Once, my teacher told me

“The true human life starts when you start to live as a person for others.”

I have sacrificed myself for others for the last 11 years. I knew how full life is rather



than running away as working for the JBFS. This is the true human life for me. I thank my students for telling me how to live the true human life.

I agree with Mother Teresa, who said

“Love is expressed by practice rather than words.”

To all the people in the world



The JBFS is a society to bring about a significant change by practice. Why don't you join us and protect Japanese nature?

If you want to join us, fill out the application at the end of this book.



Mariko Moriyama

Chairperson, Japan Bear & Forest Society

Biography:

Born in 1948, Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan. Graduated from Kobe High School and Osaka Kyoiku University with major in physics. Former science teacher of Muko-Higashi Junior High School, Amagasaki City, Hyogo Prefecture.

She began action to protect Japanese Black Bears in Hyogo Prefecture, which were about to become extinct, with her students in 1992. She said that Japan is about to become extinct as it is quietly losing its natural forest which had been ancestrally preserved. She is making a great effort to preserve rich forests where bears can live and for the descendants of Japan's people, and for all other living things.



The human race cannot survive unless we preserve the forest and live harmoniously with all the animals, based on the ideas of modern ecology.

Japanese black bear, Kuro-chan (raised by Yaeji Sato in Yamagata)

Bears are necessary for rich forests in Japan.

The JBFS is a practice-oriented nature conservation organization working on conservation and restoration of the natural ecosystem of remote mountain areas. We work very hard in order to sustain, for future generations, all the creatures living in forests. We also work to restore the natural forests similar to that formed by creatures in the past.

FOREST = PLANTS + ANIMALS

The excessive amount of plantation forests is a problem. Human beings cannot survive unless we urgently restore the traditional natural forest that produces large quantities of clean water and oxygen and is resistant to natural disasters.

In recent years, wild animals such as bears, monkeys, wild boars and deer have often come down to villages and have annoyed local people. This has been caused by human beings who have devastated the feeding grounds of the wild animals by development, plantation forests and global warming. As a result a large number of endangered bears have been captured and killed. Humans are not considerate to us bears.

Our activities include:

Lectures

The JBFS is involved in providing lectures and talks on the topic of environmental conservation. Mariko Moriyama, an ex-teacher, and now Chairperson of the JBFS, was known for encouraging her junior high school students in Amagasaki City to participate in conservation activities. To this day, she and her students have remained active in conservation and they provide lectures to students.



Environmental Education at Schools and Events

Volunteer university students regularly join activities to protect the forest in remote areas. They are also involved in giving illustrated talks about their experiences to school students. The JBFS also conducts environmental education at various schools around Japan. These include kindergarten, elementary schools and junior and senior high schools as well as some lectures for universities and the public. For more information about the education programs, please contact the Office of the JBFS.

Remote Mountain Conservation

We try to bring local people work in forestry and nature conservation, prevent animal damage, and restore the stability of mountains so there will be no landslides.

Natural Forest Restoration and Distribution of Acorns for Feeding Bears

In an infertile year in the mountains, many wild animals come down to villages and damage crops. Thus, as a short-term solution, we carry acorns² from urban areas to the mountains to provide food to wild animals, preventing them from being hunted. Meanwhile, we work hard to restore the natural forests.

Respecting the Lives of Exotic Animals

We will be true conservationists only when we respect the lives of all living creatures including exotic animals. Our solution involves no killing.

Will you join our volunteer activities?

Are you interested in getting involved in conservation activities of the JBFS?

We welcome applications from:

those who love nature and animals;

those who want to do something for the world and people; and

those who want to retain nature for their children and grandchildren.



² With researchers and specialists, we have done an excessive study of acorns so that we won't disturb the ecosystem of the destination. Please contact JBFS for more information.



How do we protect bears until forests are restored to places where animals can live?

When bears come down close to human habitation from the mountains, we should leave them alone because they are very timid. In an infertile year in the mountains we should supply the bears with extra food such as persimmons, acorns and chestnuts.

In order to prevent bears from wandering into human habitation, we should restore the forest with persimmons and other food plants.

When we come across bears in the vicinity of schools, we should look kindly upon them, and leave them alone, while walking back quietly and slowly. If bears settle down near you and annoy you, you should report them to your local public office immediately. We feel there should be trained officers to catch bears in drum cages and then release them into the wild where they have enough food to survive.

Please do not attempt to capture or frighten bears by yourself so as not to cause an injury or death to humans.

The Japan Bear and Forest Society

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