

Currently Zero Traffic Accidents in 2024!

There have been no traffic accidents involving the Iriomote cats since last year, and the number of consecutive days without accidents has now exceeded 530 (as of June 10, 2024). However, the cats still frequently appear on the roads, and recently, an adult cat with two kittens and several other individuals have repeatedly appeared on the roads between Urauchibashi and Hidachi, so we are mowing the grass to improve visibility near the site and directly warning people by putting up LED signs and flags.

On June 9, a very dangerous situation occurred when a juvenile cat began wandering on the road during a procession of cars returning from the Kaijin Evening Festival held in Shirahama, but we were able to encourage it to go away, to prevent any accidents. We are now approaching summer, when nighttime traffic volume will increase, and we plan to intensively patrol and mowing activities during the Obon season, when there are particularly a high number of tourists.



環境省西表野生生物保護センターの皆さんと合同で行った夜間注意喚起。



蒲内橋一干立周で目撃されているイリオモテヤマネコ

Lifting the ban on camping and open fire tours at various locations on Iriomote Island

At the Iriomote Island Ecotourism Promotion Council held on January 29, 2024, the Taketomi Town Natural Tourism Division, which serves as the secretariat, explained that they are considering opening up the market for camping tours at nine beach locations on Iriomote Island (locations shown in red on the map). In fact, four of the proposed camping locations are designated as Type 1 Special Areas and World Heritage Areas, and there are concerns about the negative impact on rare wild animals and plants, including the Iriomote wildcat, and the surrounding environment.

Taketomi Town has previously instructed people not to camp or



9か所のキャンプ候補地(令和5年度 第2回 西表島エコツーリズム推進協議会資料より)

make bonfires on Iriomote Island except at designated locations such as official campsites, and the Iriomote Island Ecotourism Promotion Management Plan, which was certified by the national government in 2022, also states that "camping, bonfires, and other activities are generally prohibited." In addition, the Iriomote Island Tourism Management Plan, which was formulated in March 2023, stipulates that the use of the World Heritage Site will be limited to a maximum of 20 fields that are in regular use, and that the number of areas in use will not be increased beyond this limit. The opening of the camping tours market clearly contradicts these plans, but this was very problematic, in that the plan was based on a closed meetings behind closed doors and did not clarify any of the points outlined in the Plans. Therefore, Yamaneko Patrol submitted a request to the Taketomi Town Nature and Tourism Division, requesting that the plan be opened up to the residents for discussion before final decisions were made.

We prepared a report entitled "Three Years After Iriomote Island's World Heritage Registration" and submitted it to IUCN.

On July 26, 2021, the World Heritage Committee decided to include Iriomote Island and other sites on the World Natural Heritage List, and recommended that the contracting party, Japan, implement two measures: "Keep the number of visitors to Iriomote Island within the environmental capacity" and "Strengthen roadkill measures for the Iriomote cat."

After that, Okinawa Prefecture formulated the "Iriomote Island Tourism Management Plan," which seems to have taken some measures, but unfortunately it is not an effective plan that fulfills or addresses the World Heritage Committee's criticisms.

In addition, there are also efforts to use the World Heritage area for growing the tourism in new ways, such as opening the market to camping tours as mentioned above.

Therefore, JTEF Yamaneko Patrol considered the issues regarding the conservation and management of the World Heritage site of Iriomote Island, and prepared a report entitled "Three Years After Iriomote Island's World Heritage Registration: Stagnation of Tourist Entry Restrictions and Opening the Market for New Tourism Businesses Within the Heritage Site," proposing measures that should be implemented by the Ministry of the Environment, Okinawa



Prefecture, and Taketomi Town. The report was submitted to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the advisory body for World Heritage sites. The next World Heritage Committee is scheduled to be held in Delhi (India) from July 21 to 31, 2024.

Iriomote Cat Day 2024

April 15th is Iriomote Cat Day, as designated by the Taketomi Town Ordinance. The Japan Tiger and Elephant Fund (JTEF) chapter Yamaneko Cat Patrol has planned and implemented various events since the ordinance was enacted in 2015, and this year, we cooperated with the "Iriomote Cat Children's Guide" event held at the Iriomote Wildlife Conservation Center of the Ministry of the Environment. The guides were 5th graders from Uehara Elementary School, who participated in our "Living With Iriomote Cats Program" that we conduct every year. They seemed a little nervous at first, but gradually the students relaxed as their explanation went on, and by the end they had become excellent guides. We offer our appreciation to the 5th graders from Uehara Elementary School! In addition, from the second week of April to Iriomote Cat Day on April 15th, we strengthened our nighttime patrols and conducted intensive awareness activities near the entrance to the Inaba Forest Road, where the cats often appear on the road.

