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Past issues: Traffic accidents involving Iriomote wildcats have increased dramatically since the 2000s. In 2018, nine accidents occurred, the worst ever. Nighttime traffic on Iriomote Island is increasing year by year, and the potential risk of traffic accidents is increasing year by year. If the number of tourists increases due to Iriomote Island being registered as a World Heritage Site, it will pose a threat to the island's nature and the wildcat population.

Achievements

1

Continuing nighttime patrol activities

Nighttime patrol activities, which have been conducted since 2011, have been continuously conducted. In 2023 (April 2023 to March 2024), a total of 171 patrols were conducted in two sections (North Bank Road and Western Area) where road accidents involving wildcats frequently occur. We plan to continue conducting these patrols in the future.



Photo courtesy of Gendai Igarashi

2

Raising awareness at locations where wildcats are frequently seen

In recent years, a problem with road accidents involving wildcats has been the appearance of "road-familiar individuals" that repeatedly appear on the road to eat small animals that have been run over by roads. Even if "road-familiar individuals" are chased away, they continue to appear on the road, so regular patrols are not enough to keep up. Therefore, LED signs and flags are erected at locations where wildcats repeatedly appear on the road to directly raise awareness for drivers.



Recently, we have been working with the Ministry of the Environment's Wildlife Conservation Center, Taketomi Town's Nature and Tourism Division, park volunteers, and the Iriomote Wildcat Club to carry out awareness-raising activities.

3

Weeding work at points where wildcats are frequently seen

When grass and shrubs grow on the side of the road, it becomes difficult for drivers to notice a wildcat suddenly jumping out. Also, if wildcats have a place to hide, they may spend more time on the road. Therefore, we focused on weeding between Urauchi Bridge and Hidate, a place where accidents frequently occur.



Roadside before (left) and after (right) mowing

4

In 2023, lessons on life with wildcats and teacher training

sessions were held at Uehara Elementary School, Shirahama Elementary School, and Iriomote Elementary School. Field work walking through the habitat of the Iriomote wildcat, observation with automatic cameras, and feces analysis experience have become standard lesson programs. The teacher training session, which is co-sponsored with the Taketomi Town Board of Education, was held at Ohara Junior High School.



An automatic camera (left) installed at Iriomote Elementary School successfully captured an Iriomote wildcat (right), following on from last year. This is evidence that the area around the school is still rich in nature, allowing wildcats to live there.

5

Cooperation with the "Iriomote Wildcat Day" (April 15th) Event

We cooperated with the "Children's Guide" event held by the Wildlife Conservation Center.



The guides chosen were fifth graders from Uehara Elementary School who had taken the "Life with Wildcats" class the previous year. They seemed nervous at first, but by the second time they had become excellent guides (left). This initiative was broadcast on NHK Okinawa's "Okinawa HOTeye" (right).

Remaining issues

As of October 10, there have been zero confirmed traffic

accidents in 2024, but complacency is the enemy. Meanwhile, there are worrying developments in the issue of overtourism. The Ministry of the Environment and Taketomi Town are lifting the ban on camping and bonfire tours, which have been prohibited until now, at nine locations on Iriomote Island's coast. The Yamaneko Patrol has been warning from early on that this is in contradiction to the Iriomote Island Tourism Management Plan, which was formulated after the World Heritage Committee pointed out overuse. In addition to the direct impact on Iriomote cats, sea turtles, and terns, experts have also expressed concern that in the event of a forest fire, it could have a devastating impact on Iriomote Island's precious ecosystem. We will continue to closely monitor this issue and make any necessary recommendations.

Thank you for your continued support!

Iriomote Wildcat Conservation Fund

Special Year-End Edition (Oct 2024) Corrected Google Translated English Text

Background on threats to the wild cats of Iriomote: The traffic accidents involving Iriomote wild cats have increased dramatically since the 2000s. In 2018, nine accidents occurred, the worst year for road-killed cats ever recorded. With only 100 individuals making up this small population, each adult and particularly females are very important. Nighttime traffic on Iriomote Island is increasing every year, and the potential risk of traffic accidents is an increasing threat to the island's wildlife, especially to the cats. If tourism pressure increases now that Iriomote Island is a World Heritage Site, the island's nature and ecosystems are under threat of overtourism and traffic accidents.

Summary of Achievements (in the past year)

1. Continuation of the nighttime patrol activities

Called locally as 'Yamapato,' started in 2011, night patrols have been continuously conducted to present. In 2023 (April 2023 to March 2024), a total of 171 patrols were conducted in two sections, Hokugan Road (Norther Coast) and Seibu Area (Western). Road accidents involving wildcats frequently occur in these two sections. We plan to continue conducting these patrols regularly.

2. Raising awareness at locations where wildcats are frequently seen

In the past, when cats see cars or hear people's voices, they would run away.

However, in recent years, a problem with road accidents involving the endangered cats has been the appearance of "road-familiar individuals." These are individual cats that are becoming acclimated to passing cars and people observing them. These cats are coming out onto the road to eat other small road-kill animals. Even if these "road-familiar individuals" are chased away, they continue to appear on the road, so regular patrols are not enough to keep up with so many sightings. Therefore, LED signs and flags are erected at locations where wild cats repeatedly appear on the road to directly raise awareness for drivers to slow down when passing these areas. Photo

Caption: Recently, we have been working with the Ministry of the Environment's Wildlife Conservation Center, Taketomi Town's Nature and Tourism Division, park volunteers, and the Iriomote Yamaneko Club to carry out awareness-raising activities.

3. Weeding work at points where wildcats are frequently seen

When grass and shrubs grow on the side of the road, it becomes difficult for drivers to notice a wildcat suddenly jumping out when it is dark. Also, if wildcats have a place to hide close to the road, it is likely they may spend more time on the road.

Therefore, we focused on weeding between Urauchi Bridge and Hidate, a place where accidents frequently occur. Photo Caption: Roadside before (left) and after (right) mowing.

4. In 2023 , “Living with the Iriomote Cats” Education Programs and teacher training

Sessions were held at Uehara Elementary School, Shirahama Elementary School, and Iriomote Elementary School. Field work, walking through the habitat of the Iriomote cats, observations captured by wildlife cameras and dissecting fecal samples have become standard lesson programs. The teacher training session, which is co-sponsored with the Taketomi Town Board of Education, was held at Ohara Junior High School. Photo Caption: An automatic camera (left) installed at Iriomote Elementary School successfully captured an Iriomote wildcat (right), the same cat they have been following since last year. This is evidence that the area around the school is still rich enough to support the cats living there.

5. Cooperation with the "Iriomote Wildcat Day" (April 15th) Event

Yamapato chapter leader cooperated with the "Children's Guide" event held by the Wildlife Conservation Center, where the youth gave special presentations about the cats. Photo Caption: The guides chosen were fifth graders from Uehara Elementary School who had taken the "Life with Wildcats" class the previous year. They seemed

nervous at first, but by the second time they had become excellent guides (left). This initiative was broadcast on NHK Okinawa's "Okinawa HOTeye" (right).

Remaining Issues: As of October 10, there have been zero confirmed traffic accidents in 2024, but we cannot remain complacent. Meanwhile, there are worrying developments in overtourism issues on the island. The Ministry of the Environment and Taketomi Town are lifting the ban on camping and bonfire tours, which have been prohibited until now, at nine locations on Iriomote Island's coast. The Yamaneko Patrol has been warning from early on that this is in contradiction to the Iriomote Island Tourism Management Plan, which was formulated after the World Heritage Committee pointed out overuse as a threat to the nature on the island. In addition to the direct impact on Iriomote cats, sea turtles, and terns, experts have also expressed concern that in the event of a forest fire, it could have a devastating impact on Iriomote Island's precious ecosystem. We will continue to closely monitor this issue and make any necessary recommendations.

Thank you for your continued support!



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これまでの課題 イリオモテヤマネコの交通事故は2000年代に入ってから急激に増加。2018年には過去最悪の9件の事故が発生しました。西表島の夜の交通量は年々増加傾向にあり、潜在的な交通事故リスクは年々高まり続けています。西表島の世界遺産登録に伴う観光客の増加現象が起れば、島の自然とヤマネコにとっては脅威となります。

成果

Achievement

1

夜間パトロール活動の継続実施

2011年から実施している夜間パトロール活動を継続的に実施しています。2023年(2023年4月～2024年3月)は、ヤマネコの交通事故が多発する2つの区間(北岸道路、西部地区)で計171回実施しました。今後も継続的に実施していく予定です。



写真提供: 五十嵐源大さん

2

ヤマネコ目撃多発地点での注意喚起活動

ヤマネコの交通事故で近年問題となっているのが、轢かれた小動物を食べるために繰り返し路上出没する「道路慣れ個体」の出現です。「道路慣れ個体」は追い返しても、繰り返し路上に出没するため、通常のパトロールでは対応しきれません。そこで、ヤマネコが何度も路上に出没する地点でLED看板やのぼりを立てて、ドライバーに対して直接注意喚起を行っています。



最近、環境省野生生物保護センター、竹富町自然観光課、パークボランティア、西表ヤマネコクラブの皆さんとも協力して注意喚起活動を実施しています。

3

ヤマネコの目撃多発地点での除草作業

道路わきに草や灌木類が繁茂すると、ドライバーが急なヤマネコの飛び出しに気づきにくくなります。また、ヤマネコにとっても身を隠せる場所があることで、道路での滞在時間が長くなる可能性があります。そこで、事故多発地点である浦内橋～干立間での草刈りを重点的に行いました。



草刈り前(左)と草刈り後(右)の路肩

4

ヤマネコのいるくらし授業、教員研修会実施

2023年度は上原小学校、白浜小、西表小学校で授業を実施しました。イリオモテヤマネコの生息地を歩くフィールドワーク、自動撮影カメラによる観察、フン分析体験は定番の授業プログラムになりました。竹富町教育委員会と共催している教員研修会については、大原中学校で開催しました。



西表小学校に設置した自動撮影カメラ(左)では、昨年に続きイリオモテヤマネコの撮影に成功(右)。学校周辺にもヤマネコが生息できる豊かな自然が残されていることの証拠です。

5

「イリオモテヤマネコの日」(4月15日)イベントへの協力

野生生物保護センター主催で行われた「子ども解説員」のイベントに協力しました。



解説員に選ばれたのは前年度「ヤマネコのいるくらし授業」を受けた上原小学校5年生の皆さん。最初は緊張したようでしたが、2回目からの解説は立派な解説員に(左)。この取り組みはNHK沖縄放送局の「おきなわHOTeye」にて放送されました(右)。

残された課題 2024年に確認された交通事故は、10月

10日現在ゼロですが、油断は大敵。一方、オーバーツーリズム問題では心配な出来事が。西表島の海岸9か所で、これまで禁止とされてきたキャンプ・たき火を伴うツアーを解禁する、環境省と竹富町の動きです。やまねこパトロールは、世界遺産委員会からオーバーコースを指摘され策定された「西表島観光管理計画」とも矛盾するとして、早くから警告を発してきましたが、イリオモテヤマネコやウミガメ類、アジサン類への直接的な影響のほか、山火事発生時には西表島の貴重な生態系に破滅的な影響を与えうるとして、専門家からも懸念が示されるに至っています。引き続きこの問題を注視し、必要な提言をしていきます。

引き続きのサポートをお願いします！