

## 第4部 課題

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# 第16回 毎日パソコン入力コンクール 秋季大会

【課題】

第4部 英文B

Maintain rural landscape for human-nature coexistence

制限時間5分

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Crested ibis chicks born to wild birds have been spotted on the island of Sado in Niigata Prefecture one after another, offering the heartwarming sight of parent birds feeding the chicks. 

The birth of the chicks to wild crested ibis pairs marked the first time in the country in 40 years. Although at least one of the chicks is believed to have died, the attempt to breed wild crested ibises without human help has apparently entered a new phase. It is delightful that public—private efforts toward that end are coming to fruition. 

Crested ibises build nests in tall trees in forests during the breeding season. As they subsist on pond loaches, frogs and insects, it is ideal for them to have rice paddies and grasslands around their nests. Such a traditional Japanese landscape is seen in the so—called "satochi—satoyama" areas, which are home to a range of diverse creatures. Satochi—satoyama areas consist of communities and the surrounding environment including farmland, reservoirs, grassland and secondary forests. Crested ibises are one of those creatures whose habitats are supported by such ecosystems. 

After Japanese—born crested ibises went extinct in 2003, the Environment Ministry began artificial breeding with crested ibises brought from China and eventually started releasing ibises into the wild on Sado Island in 2008. Local farmers lent a hand to the efforts, keeping water in their rice paddies during wintertime and curbing the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers in the paddies to secure feeding grounds for crested ibises. Rice harvested in paddies whose environment is friendly to animals is called "ibis rice" and is getting popular, raising expectations for a spillover effect for nature—oriented tourism as well. 

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Releasing crested ibises -- a state-designated special natural monument -- into the wild for breeding is part of efforts toward the coexistence of humans and nature. A key to that goal can be said to lie in the conservation and sustainable use of satochi-satoyama areas. 

Satochi-satoyama areas, which are an intermediary area between developed and undeveloped areas, account for some 40 percent of Japan's total land. Such an area is generally thought to be less worthy of conservation compared to pristine wilderness. However, according to a survey by the Environment Ministry, about half of areas that are home to at least five endangered species lie within the bounds of satochi-satoyama areas. 

Forests that don't receive such maintenance as underbrush clearance work and pruning tend to have overgrown trees and get dark even during the daytime, resulting in a declining number of faunae. Through human intervention, the habitats of a range of animals have been maintained rather effectively. 

That said, the environment of satochi-satoyama areas has been deteriorating due to human depopulation in hilly and mountainous areas, while development pressure still persists in suburban areas. 

At the 10th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP10) held in Nagoya in 2010, the Japanese government called for member countries' concerted efforts toward the maintenance and management of nature close to human habitats, such as satochi-satoyama areas. 

Volunteer activities by companies and citizens groups for maintaining satochi-satoyama areas have spread across Japan, and local governments are urged to give active support to such efforts. 

Last year, the Environment Ministry released the country's 500 key satochi-satoyama areas. The website introducing those areas,

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however, came with a note saying, "The listing does not mean there will be any new restrictions or regulations over the use and utilization of land" -- apparently because those areas include vast private land and it is difficult to introduce legal regulations for such development. After the listing, the ministry abolished its budgets for conserving satochi-satoyama areas, prompting one to wonder what was behind the government's call for such conservation at the COP10 meeting. 

There are also additional sources of concern for conserving satochi-satoyama areas. The Environment Ministry is mulling lifting the designation of goshawks, a bird of prey, as one of the nationally endangered species of wild fauna and flora under the Act on Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. 

Goshawks inhabit mainly in satochi-satoyama areas. They were driven out of their habitats by housing land development and were eventually designated as a nationally endangered species in 1993 after their number dropped nationwide. Since then, acts such as capturing, transferring, importing and exporting goshawks have been prohibited and extra care must be paid to them in environmental assessments. When the 2005 World Exposition was held in Aichi Prefecture, the candidate site for the venue was changed after goshawks were found building nests in the area. 

In recent years, reports of goshawk sightings in urban areas have been on the rise, and the raptor is believed not to be in immediate danger of extinction. While capturing goshawks will still be restricted even if the endangered species designation is lifted, nature conservation groups are concerned that such deregulation would pave the way for developing satochi-satoyama areas. The Environment Ministry is called upon to carefully handle the matter. 

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There is an approximately 90–hectare satochi–satoyama area in the Egawa district of Noda, Chiba Prefecture, which lies within a 30–kilometer radius from central Tokyo. In late April, Tokyo daruma pond frogs were heard croaking intensively in rice paddies in the district as farmers were preparing for rice planting. In nearby woodlands, 15 types of raptors, including goshawks and grey–faced buzzards, have been confirmed. 

The rice paddies in the district were once threatened by a residential land development plan accompanying the construction of the Tsukuba Express line. As a vast portion of farmland had already been abandoned, local residents threw their support behind the plan. However, after a construction company that was acquiring the land went under, the Noda Municipal Government set up a city–funded agricultural production corporation in 2006 and had it acquire an approximately 30–hectare land lot owned by the construction firm. 

The city–funded corporation restored the rice paddies and turned part of them into a pesticide–free community farm. After two years, Japanese fireflies were seen flying in the area during the summer, on top of a variety of dragonflies and spiders. In 2012, the city began breeding and releasing storks -- a state–designated special natural monument -- into the wild. Like goshawks and crested ibises, storks are also known to inhabit satochi–satoyama areas. 

Says Noda Mayor Takashi Nemoto, "Once lost, the natural environment will never be restored. It won't be too late if we take action now. I regarded our efforts as an investment toward the future of our children." 

Cherishing nature close to our lives and coexisting with it will lead to nurturing the diversity of animals. Let us once again share the awareness of the value of satochi–satoyama areas.

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