

## **Protecting the Natural Environment**

### *Anti-Poaching Measures*

The poaching or harvesting of rare and endemic species of plants and animals poses a severe threat to Yambaru's diverse ecosystem. The primary targets are often the most vulnerable species of wildlife, which can lead to their endangerment—or worse, extinction. Evidence of poaching has been discovered not only within Yambaru itself, but also at hotels, airports, pet shops, and even overseas. Although laws impose fines or imprisonment to protect certain species, poaching remains a persistent threat to the forests' ecological balance. Officials from the Ministry of the Environment, the Forestry Agency, and the villages of Kunigami, Ogimi, and Higashi, as well as police and other relevant organizations and local residents, regularly patrol the roads to protect forest creatures from poaching. Other protective measures include raising awareness through brochures and promotional materials, and working with local volunteers.

### *Roadkill Initiatives*

Many wild animals are killed by automobiles on Yambaru's roads, which pass through the habitats of many endemic and rare species. Incidents are particularly common in the early morning and evening for the endangered Okinawa rail, Japan's only flightless bird, and at night for the nocturnal Ryukyu long-haired rat. In some areas, fences and underpasses have been constructed to reduce animal road crossings. Warning signs to drivers have been installed at sites where accidents are likely to occur, and awareness campaigns are conducted to inform both local people and visitors of the problem.

### *Halting Invasive Alien Species*

Stopping the spread of invasive alien species of both plants and animals in Yambaru is essential, as these species continue to disrupt the ecological balance. One crucial initiative involves using fences and traps to eradicate mongooses, which have devastated the area's ecosystem. Other action plans focus on eliminating feral cats and managing the care of domestic

cats. Invasive plants, which can spread rapidly via vehicles or clothing, also pose a threat. Efforts are being made to improve the early detection and control of particularly harmful species to minimize their impact.

### *Increasing Rare Species Numbers*

Projects to increase the numbers of rare species include a captive breeding initiative for the Okinawa rail and public awareness-raising activities for local residents. Surveys of the population and breeding conditions of the Okinawa woodpecker are underway, and some parts of its habitat have been designated as protected areas. Among other species, the habitats of the Yambaru long-armed scarab beetle are being surveyed.