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 biodiverse environment. The most frequent targets are often the most vulnerable species of wildlife, which could lead to endangered status—or worse, extinction. While laws protect some designated species with fines or imprisonment, poaching and illegal harvesting continue to threaten the ecological balance of the forest. 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 and ask all visitors to cooperate in efforts to protect and preserve Yambaru's unique environment.

Preventing Roadkill

Initiatives are underway to minimize the number of wild animals killed by

automobiles, as Yambaru's roads 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 nighttime 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 such accidents happen frequently, and campaigns are held to increase awareness among both local people and visitors.

Halting Invasive Alien Species

The introduction of invasive alien species of both plants and animals is a continuing issue in Yambaru, as their spread upsets the ecological balance. There have been extensive efforts, for example, to eliminate mongooses, which were brought to Okinawa in the early twentieth century to control rats and snakes, since they have wreaked havoc on Yambaru's native plant and animal species, including the flightless Okinawa rail. The Ministry of

the Environment and Okinawa Prefecture are working with a group of experts known as the "mongoose busters," using fences and traps to eliminate the animal from the Yambaru region. There are plans in place to eliminate feral cats and to manage the care of domestic cats. Destructive invasive plants, whether introduced by vehicles, people's clothing, or other means, can spread quickly. Efforts are being made to improve the early detection and control of some of the worst examples of these species, such as bitter vine (*Mikania micrantha*) and alligator weed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*).

Protecting Rare Species

Poaching and harvesting of rare species can range from collecting for personal use to large-scale commercial operations. Evidence of poaching has been discovered not only in Yambaru itself, but at hotels, airports, pet shops, and even overseas. Measures to reduce poaching and harvesting include strengthening oversight through road patrols, monitoring species counts, raising awareness through brochures and promotional materials,

and working with local volunteers.