

PANEL 5: BEARS AND HUMAN BEINGS

Bear Damage and Bear Control in Japan

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The bear in Hokkaido (see Frontispiece), the northernmost island of Japan, is *Ursus arctos yesoensis*, which is a kin species of the brown bear on the Asiatic Continent. The body weight of the largest one is nearly 400 kg or about 880 pounds. There are too many bears on Hokkaido, as they do much damage and disturb the development of the land. The Yezo brown bear attacks human beings, killing on the average of 1.3 men and hurting 3.6 men every year. The number of horses killed in one year was recorded as 44, of cattle 55 and of sheep 17,921.

Since 1955, on the average, 509 bears have been killed every year. I estimate from these statistics that about 3,000 bears inhabit Hokkaido. Among them 1500 are females of which a half propagate each year, individual females giving birth to two cubs every two years. Therefore 750 newborn cubs appear every year. 500 bears are killed and 250 bears die of natural causes. Therefore the size of the bear population remains constant despite intensive hunting.

The damage by the bear in the rural parts of Hokkaido is very serious and so the Government encourages hunters to kill the bear by offering a bounty. The ordinary game season for the bear begins from October 1st and ends at the middle of February. However, the bear hibernates from the middle of November. So, the government issues special licenses to shoot the bear any time when a wild bear appears to be attacking human beings or domestic animals. Up to now no effective method to diminish the number of bears has been found.