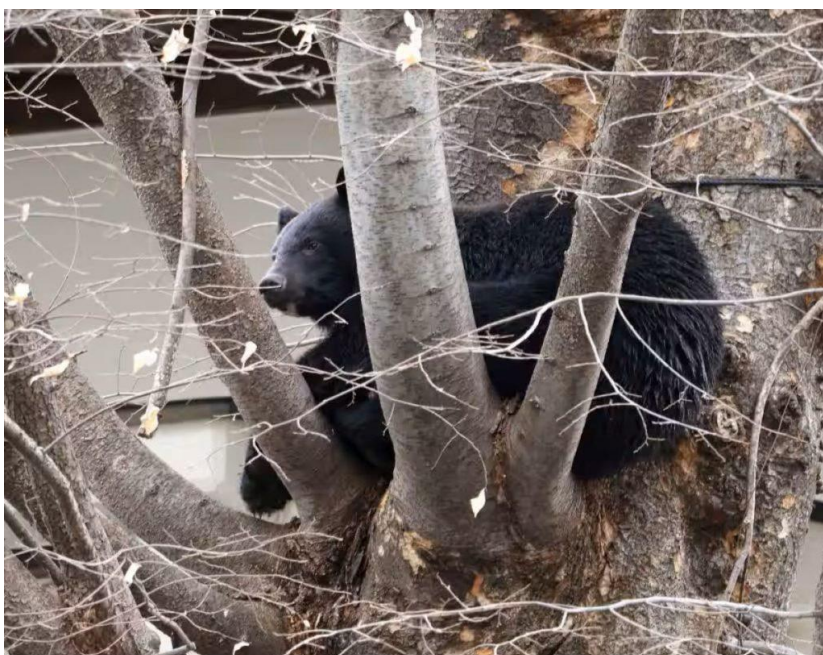


How to Reduce Bear Attacks? First, Know the Numbers

今回は、日本各地で問題となっているクマの出没に関する話題です。都市のすぐ近くでクマが目撃されるケースが増え、負傷者も出ています。人間の暮らしと野生動物の距離が縮まる中、どのように共存していけるのでしょうか？あなたの住む地域では、野生動物との関わりについて何か気になることがありますか？



1. Article

Read the following article aloud.

Bear sightings and attacks on people have been occurring one after another from Hokkaido to Hiroshima Prefecture. Moreover, many have resulted in serious injuries in 2025.

From April to the end of June alone, there were 37 victims. This figure is comparable to the same period in Fiscal Year 2023, when there were 219 bear attack victims. It was the highest number of victims for any single year since statistics first became available in FY2006.

In 2025, severe beech nut crop failure is predicted for the mountainous areas of the Tohoku region. Beech nuts (buna no mi) are a primary food source for Asiatic black bears. This, too, is similar to 2023, which also had an extremely poor harvest. Consequently, humans need to be on high alert everywhere for the appearance of bears as we head into the autumn.

Continued on next page.

Source: How to Reduce Bear Attacks? First, Know the Numbers
JAPAN Forward

1. Article

In the fall of 2023, a shortage of beech nuts led to mass hunger among bear populations, resulting in a series of human injuries caused by "urban bears" invading densely populated areas. Although it would be best to avoid a repeat of this situation, the circumstances are extremely difficult to manage.

Beech nuts were plentiful in Tohoku region forests in 2024, so there should be even more bear cubs in 2025. That could further exacerbate the expected food shortage, making it more likely for bears to come down from the mountains.

In the past, farming and mountain villages located in the satoyama, the area between mountains and urban areas, helped bears distinguish the extent of their habitat. However, due to the aging of society, population decline, and the abandonment of farmland, the functionality of the satoyama is declining. Now, once a bear leaves the mountains, it must be bewildered to find itself almost immediately in an urban setting.

To stem the increase in injuries from bear attacks, the Ministry of the Environment designated bears as a managed category of wildlife in early 2025. As a result, the national government will now cover the costs for hunting or capturing bears for the prefectures. Furthermore, starting from September, the revised Wildlife Protection, Control, and Hunting Management Act will permit the use of hunting rifles in urban areas at the discretion of city and town mayors.

However, these measures are merely responses to problems bears are causing in human habitats. They are unlikely to provide fundamental solutions.

To implement scientific management, it is essential to know the number of bears living throughout Japan. That is data on which we currently have no firm grasp.

The Ministry of the Environment roughly estimates the present Asiatic black bear population at 42,000. However, that estimate lacks precision. Indeed, estimates range from 22,000 to 55,000.

In FY2023 alone, approximately 7,700 bears were captured or killed. Without better data, there is a constant risk of over-culling that could lead to extinction.

As a first step to address the problem, funds should be allocated for an accurate survey of Japan's bear populations. That would provide the foundation for other measures. After all, due to excessive hunting pressure, bears have become extinct in Kyushu and are on the verge of extinction in Shikoku.

We must not repeat past mistakes. Bears living in the deep mountains play a key role in preserving a healthy ecosystem.

2. Key phrases and vocabulary

First repeat after your tutor and then read aloud by yourself.

1. **invade** (～に) 侵入する

The kitchen has been **invaded** by ants.

2. **habitat** 生息地

The skipjack tuna's **habitat** includes the warm tropical waters of the open ocean.

3. **estimate** (～を) 見積もる、推定する

I **estimate** it will take us another six weeks to finish the project at work.

4. **funds** 資金、予算

We don't have the **funds** right now to buy a new car.

5. **accurate** 正確な、的確な

To use GPS technology for maps, you need a very **accurate** clock.

3. Questions

Read the questions aloud and answer them.

1. Why are bears invading urban areas more and more these days?
2. What steps has the Ministry of the Environment taken so far to try to solve the problem?
3. What does the author say is needed to properly deal with the situation? Why?
4. What do you think we should do to stop bears from entering towns and cities? Include your own ideas, ideas from the reading, or both.
5. Habitat loss continues to increase for different reasons. What can we do to prevent further habitat loss and animal extinctions?

4. 多発するクマ被害 生息数の把握を急ぎたい

クマの出没と深刻な人身被害が北海道から広島県までの各地で相次いでいる。

被害者数は4月から6月末までに37人に達した。統計で確認できる平成18年度以降、年間219人に上る最多の被害者を出した令和5年度の同時期に匹敵する数字である。

今年の東北地方ではツキノワグマが食べる、山中のブナの実の凶作が予測されている。令和5年も凶作だったので状況の似た今年は、秋に向けてクマへの十分な警戒が必要だ。

2年前の秋にはブナの不足で空腹になり、市街地に侵入する「アーバンベア」による事故が続発した。その繰り返しは何としても回避したいが、対応への難度は高い。

昨年の東北地方のブナは豊作傾向だったので、今年は子グマの数が増えているはずだ。その分、秋の食物不足は一層深刻化して、山からクマが下りてくることになりやすい。

かつては奥山と市街地の間に位置した農山村の存在がクマに生息領域の区分を知らせていたのだが、高齢化や人口減、耕作放棄などの進行で、その機能が衰退している。クマにとっては、奥山を抜けると、そこは市街地だった、ということになるのだろう。

人身被害の増加を防ぐため、環境省は昨春、クマを指定管理鳥獣に位置付けた。捕獲などに要する費用が国から都道府県に支給される。また鳥獣保護管理法の改正で、今年9月からは市町村長の判断によって市街地でも猟銃の発砲が可能になる。

だが、これらの措置は人間の生活圏で問題を起こしたクマへの現場対応であり、抜本策にはなりにくい。科学的な管理には国内のクマの生息頭数の把握が不可欠なのだが、これがしっかりつかめていないのだ。

環境省が見積もるツキノワグマの個体数は4万2千頭だ。しかし、この推定には2万2千～5万5千頭という幅があって精度に欠ける。令和5年度だけでも約7700頭を捕殺しているので、過剰駆除によって絶滅に追い込むリスクが絶えない。

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4. 多発するクマ被害 生息数の把握を急ぎたい

まずは正確な生息数調査に予算を投じてもらいたい。それが諸対策の礎（いしずえ）だ。高過ぎた狩猟圧で九州では絶滅し、四国でも絶滅寸前だ。この轍（てつ）を踏んではなるまい。奥山でのクマは生態系の一角を担う存在である。



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