

うさぎの減少に関する報道について

大久野島のうさぎが減少！？ — その実体について

Regarding the News Report on the Decrease of Rabbits on the Island



一部の報道や口コミで大久野島のうさぎの数が減ったと伝えられています。大久野島に暮らすうさぎは従来、島の8割以上を占める山の中で暮らし、自生している樹木の根や植物などを食べていました。しかし、観光客がえさを与え始めてから、うさぎたちは山の中の食べものよりも観光客からのバラエティ豊かで栄養価の高いえさを好むようになり、それを目当てに休暇村本館前や棧橋などがある平地に降りてくるようになりました。

2020年からのコロナ禍の影響を受け、大久野島を訪れる観光客が例年に比べて減少しました。このことに伴い、一部では島のうさぎの数が減少したといわれています。しかし、観光客からのえさを当てにできなくなり、従来の住処である山の中に生活圏を移したというのが実情のようです。

環境省が定期的に島の数ヶ所で行っている、うさぎの個体数調査では、コロナ禍以降全体数が減少傾向にあるようですが、2020年冬の調査では、これまでで最も多い約1,000羽を観測した2018年より個体数が増えている生息域もあります。全体的に死骸の数も大きな変化は見られません。栄養不足による繁殖能力の低下を懸念する声についても、うさぎの繁殖期（春から夏）を迎えてからの調査を待った方がよいと思われれます。また、深い森に覆われ、歩道のない山間部では、うさぎを確認する作業が大変困難であることも考慮すべきでしょう。こういった点から、うさぎは、観光客からもらえるえさが少なくなった平地から、食べるものがある山の中に生活圏を移さざるを得なくなったのでは？と推測しています。

なお、うさぎが観光客の前に姿を見せるのは天候や気温、時間帯などに大きく左右されます。訪れる日によって見られるうさぎの数は異なりますので、コロナ禍の影響を受けて観光客が減少する前から「うさぎが思った以上にたくさんいた」「あまり見られなかった」と、どちらの声も私どもに寄せられていました。うさぎは従来、薄明薄暮性の動物であり、早朝と夕方の時間帯に行動が活発になる生き物です。しかし、大久野島のうさぎは、日中に観光客からえさをもらえるため、長年をかけて昼間も活発に行動するようになりました。しかし、やはり本能なのでしょう、今でも早朝と夕方の時間帯が一番活発です。特に、お腹のすいている早朝は、一番えさをねだってきます。

今後、観光客がえさを与える機会が増えるとともに、うさぎたちは再び平地を中心に暮らすのではないかと思います。その時々々の環境に合わせて生活圏を変えるのは、屋外で自由気ままに暮らすうさぎならではのユニークな生態です。人間が徹底管理する動物園では見られない、うさぎたちがありのままに生きている島は珍しく、それも大久野島の人気を支えている理由のひとつではないでしょうか。これからも私どもは大久野島のうさぎを見守っていきます。ぜひ、このようなユニークな動物の生態が見られる「うさぎの島」を、今後とも温かく見守っていただけましたら幸いです。

2021年5月24日
うさぎの島への玄関口
忠海港



Regarding the News Report on the Decrease of Rabbits on the Island



It has come to our attention that some news reports have reported that the number of rabbits on Rabbit Island has been decreasing and it seems that this news has spread further by word of mouth. The rabbits on Rabbit Island have traditionally populated in the mountains, which cover more than 80% of the island, and their main source of food and sustenance was the native tree roots and plants. However, after tourists started coming to the island and feeding them, they naturally began to prefer the more nutritious food that the tourists bring, and therefore came down the mountains to where there are more sources of food, such as around the main hotel building and the pier.

Some are saying that the number of rabbits on the island has decreased significantly in the recent years. However, the current situation is simply that they have collectively moved back into the mountains, their traditional habitat, since they can no longer rely on food from tourists.

The Ministry of the Environment regularly conducts rabbit population surveys at several locations on the island, and although the collected information on the number of rabbits would appear to be on a downward trend since COVID-19, in the 2020 survey, there are some habitats where the number of rabbits has increased since 2018, when the highest ever number was recorded at around 1,000. As for the common complaint that the decrease is due to a loss in their reproductive capacity resulting from nutritional deficiencies, it might be better to wait for the new surveys conducted after rabbit breeding season in spring and summer. Consequently, there is evidence to suggest that the rabbits have been forced to move from their newer living area, the plains, where there is

currently less food available from tourists, to their traditional living area, the mountains, where there is more food from the original natural sources.

It is also worth mentioning that the number of rabbits appearing in front of the visitors depends on the weather conditions of the visit and the time of day. We often receive comments from tourists claiming that they were lucky enough to encounter many more rabbits than expected, and at the same time, some sadly report that they were unlucky and saw fewer than they had hoped. By nature, rabbits are twilight animals and are more active in the early morning and evening hours. However, the rabbits on Rabbit Island have become more active during the day as well, because they have been fed by visitors arriving predominately during the day for many years. However, they are still most likely to ask for food, in the early morning especially, when they are still hungry.

In the future, when tourism has returned to normal and people can have opportunities to feed them again, the rabbits will almost certainly shift their living areas back down from the mountains again. Rabbit Island is a unique place, where rabbits live in their own nature, as they are, something that cannot be seen in zoos or other such places managed by humans. It is probably one of the main reasons the island has gained popularity worldwide. We will continue to watch over the rabbits on the island with its own unique rabbit ecology.

The Gateway to Rabbit Island
Tadanômi Port
24th May, 2021

