

A letter from a Tsushima leopard cat



Inokashira Park Zoo

Tsushima leopard cats live in the island called "Tsushima."

It is located between Kyusyu and the Korean Peninsula and is geographically closer to the Peninsula. This mountainous island has few flat areas.

There are many forests and woods, and various creatures live in the island.



The Tsushima sika deer and the Tsushima salamander only live in Tsushima.

It is believed that the ancestor of the Tsushima leopard cat came from the continent (Korean Peninsula) to Tsushima about 100,000 years ago when it was connected to the continent by land.

In addition, Tsushima was also connected to Japan by land, and animals which were migrated from Japan also live in Tsushima. Some animals uniquely evolved since Tsushima became an island long time ago.

The Tsushima leopard cat is different from domestic cats well known to us.

Domestic cats are improved by humans, and the Tsushima leopard cat is a wild cat.

Characteristics of the Tsushima Leopard Cat

Tsushima leopard cat

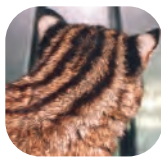
Scientific name : *Prionailurus bengalensis euptilurus*
Japanese Red List : Critically endangered

Body weight : 3 ~ 5 kg

Body length : 50 ~ 60 cm

Forehead:

There are black and white vertical stripes.

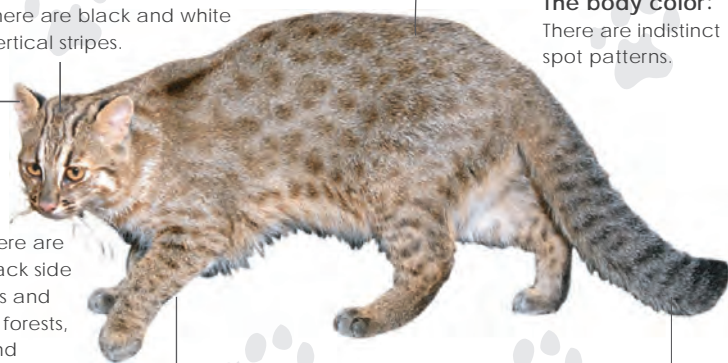


Ears:

Round at the top. There are white spots on the back side just like those of tigers and leopards. In the dark forests, they are helpful to find parents, children and others of same species.

The body color:

There are indistinct spot patterns.



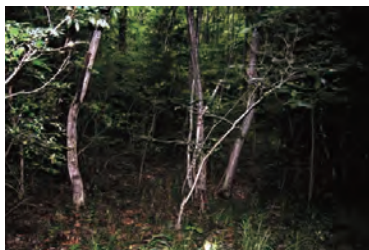
Feet:

Thick and short.

Tail:

Thick and long.

Tsushima leopard cats mostly spend their time in the forests and woods, but they also appear in rice fields, farm lands and occasionally in the rivers and coasts. Once upon a time, Tsushima leopard cats lived close to humans.



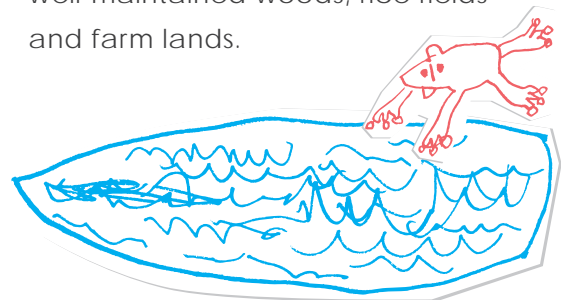
Tsushima leopard cats eat various creatures, such as mice, moles, birds, frogs, snakes and insects. Rich nature, which hosts various creatures, is necessary for the survival of Tsushima leopard cats. There were many prey animals in well-maintained woods, rice fields and farm lands.



A kind of katydid



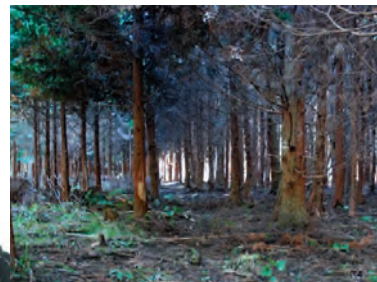
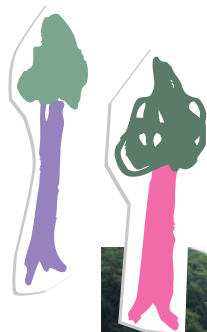
Red-banded snake



Why the population of Tsushima leopard cats are decreasing?

Habitat loss

The mountains are the main habitat of the Tsushima leopard cats, but the plantation of cedars and Japanese cypresses has made the life of Tsushima leopard cats difficult. The woods, rice fields and farm lands are no longer maintained, and prey animals decreased. Roads are developed, and the habitats are disconnected by the roads.



Infection from domestic cats

There are possibilities of feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) infection from unconfined domestic cats and stray cats.



A stray cat photographed by an automatic camera placed in the habitat of the Tsushima leopard cats.

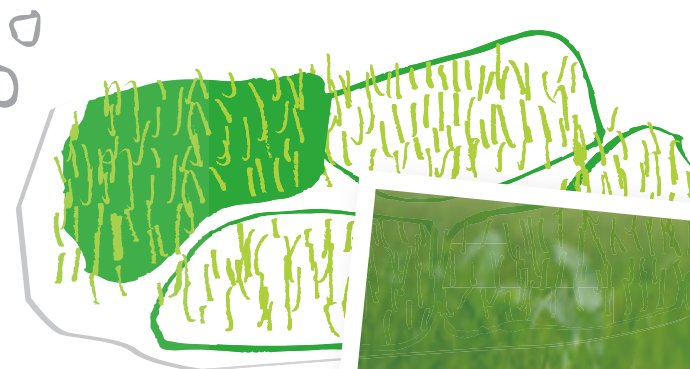
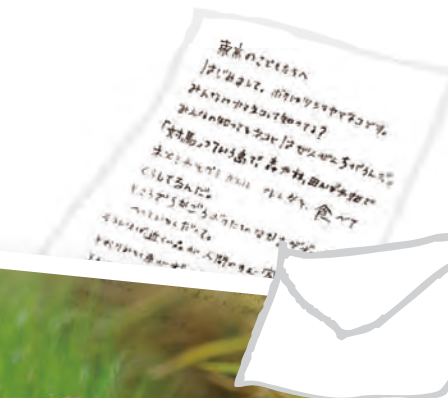
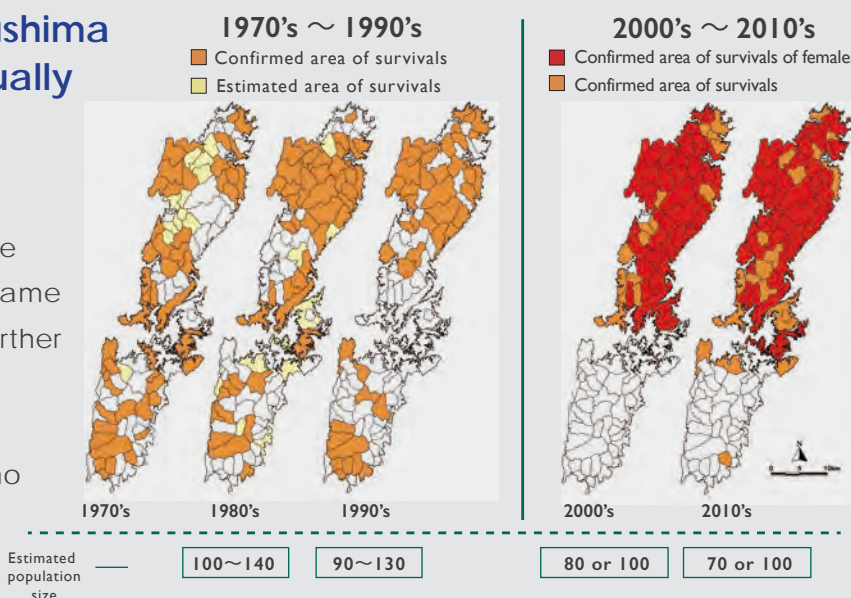


Photo by Makoto Kawaguchi



The population of Tsushima leopard cats is gradually declining.

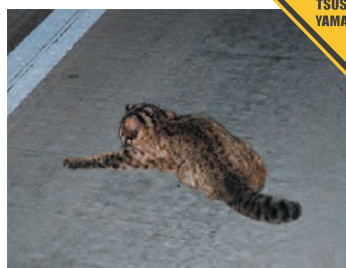
It was estimated that there were 250 - 300 of them in the 1960's, but the number became 90 - 130 in the 1990's and further declined to 70 - 100 in the 2010's. Tsushima leopard cats are no longer observed in some habitat areas of the island.



Road kill

The roads run through the middle of the Tsushima leopard cat habitats. As far as we know, 84 cats have been killed by traffic accidents between 1992 and March 2016.

A warning sign for leopard cats.



A Tsushima leopard cat killed by a traffic accident.

Trap

Tsushima leopard cats get caught by steel traps, which are installed to protect chickens from weasels, and injure severely.

We have made our life comfortable and rich while made the environment harsh to the life of Tsushima leopard cats.

The Tsushima leopard cats have lived with humans in Tsushima for a very long time. However, the situations surrounding the Tsushima leopard cats have changed as our life style has changed. Our life is deeply related to the decline in the population of the Tsushima leopard cats.



In order to protect the Tsushima leopard cats, local residents, NPOs, Tsushima City, Nagasaki Prefecture, Ministry of the Environment and zoos are doing various conservation activities. It is important to maintain and improve the living environment of the Tsushima leopard cats. Locals are trying to revive traditional forests, rice fields and farm lands for the Tsushima leopard cats to live comfortably.



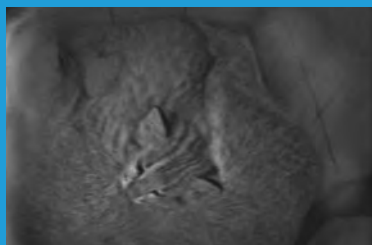
Slash and burn agriculture is revived to establish a feeding ground to increase the number of prey animals such as rodents for the Tsushima leopard cats.



Efforts by zoos

The zoos, which keep Tsushima leopard cats, cooperate with the the protection and recovery program for Tsushima leopard cats carried out by Ministry of the Environment. It is important that zoos work on captive breeding and increase the number of individuals as an insurance against possible extinction of the wild population, and when the environment of Tsushima is improved, the cats can be returned to the habitats. Some zoos already succeeded to breed in captivity, and to disperse the risk of natural disaster and infectious diseases, several domestic zoos raise Tsushima leopard cats. Scientific data collected at the zoos can be useful for the conservation activity of the Tsushima leopard cats.

At Inokashira Park Zoo



Each Zoo, which keeps Tsushima leopard cats, takes a separate role to effectively carry out the breeding effort.

At Inokashira Park Zoo, we apply artificial insemination technique to aim at the successful reproduction of the Tsushima leopard cat. In 2014, we succeeded in the artificial insemination of the Amur leopard cat, which is closely related to the Tsushima leopard cat, and the baby is safely born and growing.

Other things the zoo can do

Carrying out captive breeding and informing the current situation of the Tsushima leopard cat to the public are important missions of the zoo, and we can do these because hundreds of thousands of people visit the zoo each year. We would like to tell about the Tsushima leopard cat through various activities at Inokashira Park Zoo.

Not only the Tsushima leopard cat but also many other animals are currently at risk of disappearing from the earth. Let's use the Tsushima leopard cat as a starter to think together about what we humans should do and can do.

Cooperation: Tsushima Wildlife Conservation Center, Ministry of the Environment
Tsushima City