

The Toki in Japan



The Reason Toki Populations in Japan Declined

1. Excessive hunting in the Meiji Period: People hunted the birds for their beautiful feathers.
2. Destruction of habitat: Deforestation and reclamation of land during and after World War Two, decrease of their food supply and food poisoning caused by the use of agricultural chemicals, decreased number of terraced rice paddies (their feeding grounds) due to the nation's reduction policy, and increased number of natural enemies.
3. A decrease in breeding potential due to aging and inbreeding.

("Kin") The last female Toki that lived in Japan, born in 1967. It was named after Kintaro Uji, the person who took care of the bird. It was caught in 1968, and died in 2003.

At the end of Taisho Period, Toki were thought to be extinct but were later found on Okinoshima Island, Noto Peninsula and Sado Island.

It was estimated in the early Showa period that there were 5 to 20 Toki on Noto, and 60 to 100 Toki on Sado. They became extinct on Okinoshima Island in 1945, and the last bird found in Noto was captured in 1970 and sent to the Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center. After World War Two Sado was designated as a sanctuary for the Toki, and local people fed the birds and maintained terraced paddies. However the number of Toki continued to decline and by 1975 there were less than 10 left alive.

No cases of breeding were found in the wild after 1975, and the Ministry of the Environment decided to protect the remaining 5 birds for use in a breeding program. The 5 birds were caught in 1981 and raised in the Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center along with Kin. They made pairs but failed to give birth to any chicks. Then they died one after another, and only the female Kin and the male Midori were left as of 1986.

After 1985, people tried to breed them by bringing in a Toki from the Beijing Zoo and sending Midori to the Beijing zoo, but this failed to produce any offspring. Midori died in 1995, and Kin, the last native Japanese Toki, died in October, 2003.

Breeding programs first started in Japan in 1999, when China donated a pair of ibises, who had a chick named Yu-yu. Since 2000, the number of chicks raised has gradually increased, and as of 2007 there were over 100 birds at the Sado Japanese Crested Ibis Conservation Center (includes the Reintroduction Center).

Training to prepare Toki birds for reintroduction to Sado began in 2007 at the Reintroduction Center, and in September 2008, 10 birds were released into the wild. As of September 2012, a total of 108 birds have been released over 7 occasions.

The Toki in China

In China, the number of Toki drastically decreased after 1930 due to excessive hunting and the destruction of their habitats. As no Toki had been found after 1964, they were thought to have gone extinct.

However in 1981, the same year all of the wild Toki were caught in Japan, 7 ibises were rediscovered in the southern part of the mountain range in Shaanxi Province.

China implemented strong conservation policies including prohibiting deforestation and the use of agricultural chemicals, and dispatched observers to the Toki's habitat. At the same time, the nation started breeding programs by protecting chicks that fell from the nest or birds that had been injured.

The breeding program had its first success at the Beijing Zoo in 1989, and since 1995 the program has been operated out of the Shaanxi Rare Wildlife Rescue and Breeding Center.

Due to the national policies to protect wild Toki and the breeding programs, there are now over 1,000 Toki in China.



(Wild Toki in China)

Wild Toki are only seen in Yang County and Ningshan County of Shaanxi Province, China. Photo was presented by Yoshimitsu Sugimoto of the Japanese Society for Preservation of Birds.