

A project for breeding the Japanese squirrel (*Sciurus lis*) and the possibility of reintroduction: a case study at the Inokashira Park Zoo, Tokyo, Japan

Miki OKUBO¹ and Noriko TAMURA²

¹Japan Network of Sciurid Researchers, Japan (okubo_miki@hotmail.com) ²Forestry and Forest Products Research Institute, Japan (haya@ffpri.affrc.go.jp)

In 1980's, as one of the roles of the zoos, Tokyo Metropolitan Zoos forwarded the "Zoo-stock plan". This plan is to protect and reproduce rare species under breeding. It is also aimed to release the captive-bred animals to natural habitat in the future.

Under this plan, the Inokashira Park Zoo has picked the Japanese squirrel as the "zoo-stock species", as it has been focusing on displaying and breeding endemic Japanese species.

The zoo formed the "Squirrels' woods project" to release captive-bred squirrels on the zoo ground. The project is advanced in four steps.

1. Establishment of breeding technologies.
2. Releasing the captive-bred squirrels into walk-through cage to habituate themselves to the presence of visitors.
3. Transferring the squirrels to an even larger walk-through cage that permits interaction with visitors.
4. Releasing the squirrels onto the zoo grounds.

At present the project is in step 3 and attempting step 4. So far the breeding has been running smoothly to some

extent. However, as the squirrels at the walk-through cage have become tame, we see some problems like the squirrels approaching visitors, visitors feeding the squirrels or being bitten by the squirrels occasionally by putting out their hands carelessly, and so on.

Also by experimental release trials, we identified some issues that we have to solve, such as the need to decrease the number of jungle crows and cats in the zoo and increase natural vegetation. On the other hand, observing whether the captive-bred squirrels have the survival skills outside the cage is indispensable. With these aspects we would like to examine the rearing without closed cages of the breeding population and by extension the possibility of reintroducing Japanese squirrels to natural habitat.

We extend our appreciation to the Inokashira Park Zoo for the cooperation.