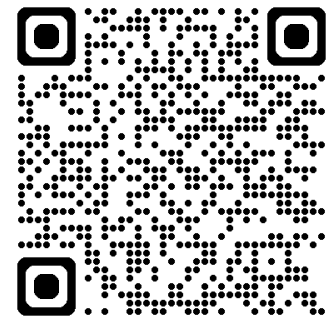


After record bear attacks in Japan, life in Akita isn't the same



<https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/videos/20251128162217594/>

As we've been seeing, bear attacks are on the rise across Japan, but one region is seeing the bulk of the casualties. From April to October of this year, the environment ministry says 197 people were injured or killed by bears nationwide. Those attacks were recorded in 21 prefectures, but Akita tops the list at 56 cases, the country's highest. NHK World's Moritani Hinako is on the ground there. So, Hinako, how are people dealing with this?

They're needing to make a lot of changes to daily life. I'm at Akita International University. It's known for being close to nature, but even though the woods are nearby, this year is worse than ever. The school is now being forced to take special precautions. Posters like these are popping up across campus, warning students to be on high alert. A bear was seen here last month. Along with posters, the university is using more firecrackers to scare off bears. They've also placed cans of bear spray around the school. The automatic doors on campus buildings have been turned off to prevent bears from wandering inside. Without touching an ID card, the doors won't open. When a bear is sighted, the University sends out an email to all students telling them to stay indoors whenever possible. We spoke with students about how they are adjusting to the changes.

Do you have bears in Germany?

No, not at all. At least that I know of. So, the bear topic is completely new to me. We shouldn't walk alone which means I'm going with friends most of the time. All of us, we've got bear bells.

I actually saw a bear just about 3 days ago. My place is close to the school, and I can hear the sound of firecrackers, so I hope the bears can hear them too and stay away.

As you can see, this University is located in a nature rich, green environment which is one of its selling

points. However, this year we've raised our alert level by one or two notches compared to usual.

Some of the students come from countries where bears aren't a concern. To help them stay safe, the university is also handing out bear bells free of charge.

Yes, we can see the university is taking this very seriously. Hinako, what about the other areas in the region? Are they also feeling the impact?

Yes. Akita prefecture is known for its hot springs and fall colors, and it usually attracts many tourists. But this year, the streets are looking empty. According to a survey by one of the local tourism associations, over 70% of hotels and inns reported a drop in revenue this season. The most common reason is frequent bear sightings. It's also hurting local businesses. This company produces soy sauce and miso. They supply products to souvenir shops and supermarkets nearby. But sales have dropped by over 20% compared to last year. The shop president also chairs the tourism association. He says it's a situation they have never seen before.

Autumn foliage season is one of the busiest times and a 20% drop in sales during this period is extremely serious.

So, we see even the local economy is feeling the effects. Hinako, how long is this bear alert going to last?

Mochizuki Shota is an associate professor at Fukushima University. He told us that many bears have already started hibernating so actively things have peaked and are now calming down. However, he also says that a certain number of bears are still active. One reason is that some cubs have been separated from their mothers and don't know how to hibernate. These bears may wander into towns because their mothers were killed, leaving them without guidance. Normally these cubs cannot survive the winter due to lack of food, but if they learn to find food in urban areas, they might survive by relying on that method. That means people still have to remain vigilant until January. For instance, it is important to check for paw prints on snow or on the ground. When going outside, carry a bear bell or a radio to make noise then people will know that bears are nearby.

Source: (NHK World News)

Now discuss the questions with a partner.

1. What other areas' economies do you think are affected by the recent increase in bear attacks?
2. Can you think of any other preventative measures the university could take to protect students and staff?
3. Have you heard of any other bear news recently?
4. What other animals could be a threat in Japan if they came closer to humans?
5. Have you ever had a dangerous encounter with an animal?