



Column **Kijimun's Monologue**

"Some mysterious secrets hidden in the University of the Ryukyus"

No. 5- Nature found on Senbaru campus of the University of the Ryukyus (Part II)



Museum (Fujukan)

Iisogwachidebiru! Kijimunyaibin! (Happy New Year! It's Kijimun!)

This is Part II of "Nature found on Senbaru campus of the University of the Ryukyus (Part I)," the first issue of the year. We once again asked Mr. Takeshi Sasaki of the Ryukyu University Museum (Fujukan) about the nature on Senbaru Campus.



Japanese white-eye (Ryudai)

So, you've probably noticed that there are many birds in Senbaru Pond. Mr. Sasaki says that wild ducks come to the pond in the winter. Among the birds in the pond is the Ryukyu Ruddy Kingfisher, a summer bird which comes to Ryudai in early summer and departs some time around October. Mr. Sasaki also said that in Miyako Island, the arrival of a Ryukyu Ruddy Kingfisher at one's home is believed to be inauspicious. There are numerous legends and folklores related to birds. Come to the library and find some materials about them!

In the biotope located in the garden outside Fujikan are *tounaja* (Asian swamp eel).



Japanese bayberry

In the Ryukyuan *komonjo* (ancient document) *Gyozen Honzo* (edible plants of Ryuku), which was written by Tokashiki Tsukan in the 19th century, it says that *tounaja* are edible and are believed to be hematopoietic. It also says that eating *tounaja* with dog meat or blood is taboo, which is quite telling of the dietary culture of the time.



Quercus miyagii nut

Mr. Sasaki also said that Senbaru campus has an acid soil area, where plant species of northern Okinawa as well as those of southern Okinawa grow. One unique species that grows in the area is the *Okinawa-urairo-gasi* (*Quercus miyagii*), which produces Japan's largest acorn.

The *Okinawa-urairo-gasi* has been excavated in its original state from several historic sites across Okinawa. Mr. Sasaki also said that the *iju* and Japanese bayberry, both of which are native to northern Okinawa, grow naturally in the area.



Japanese tit (Okinawan bird)

So how does Japan's largest acorn (which was eaten by the Jomon people as well) taste? Apparently, it isn't particularly tasty compared with other acorn species. When Shuri Castle was constructed during the Ryukyu dynasty, large *Okinawa-urairo-gasi* growing in

the mountains in northern Okinawa were cut down and hauled manually. The lumber was used for the pillars of Shuri Castle.



Iju

Plants and animals which are closely connected with people's lives are quite fascinating, aren't they? We invite you to visit the Ryukyu University Museum and experience Okinawa's nature and culture. Stay tuned for the next issue of Kijimun's Monologue. (AS)

*Many thanks to Mr. Takeshi Sasaki, assistant professor, museum curator of Fujukan for the photographs.

