

The Hanzaki

Although it is said that the Hanzaki continue living even if ripped in half, we still do not know whether this is true or not.

It has been over 120 years since Chiyomatsu Ishikawa visited Yubara in order to conduct his research regarding the *Hanzaki*.

If was the impetus for the current research into the *hanzaki*.

The artificial hatching of the Giant Salamanders at Hiroshima's Asa Zoo has provided more ecological information, but that is only one of the many things that the *hanzaki* research has brought about.

As the Giant Salamanders are nationally designated a Protected Species, there is a lot to take into consideration when looking after them.

Firstly, when looking to do a survey or research, you must first gain permission from the Agency of Cultural Affairs to enter the rivers.

Catching or raising hanzaki in a personal pond without permission, is a punishable crime.

When doing a survey, preparations include flashlights, nets, *possessing a long torso* etc.

As the *hanzaki* are nocturnal animals, surveyors search the river with flashlights around 30 minutes after the sun sets, when they emerge from their caves and can be caught-after which they are all measured. Their entire body length, weight, legs...and other distinctive features are all recorded before being released back where they were found.

One of the more difficult things to determine is whether the animal is male or female.

However, as the breeding season at the beginning of August approaches, the male animals' cloaca is swell up, and are thus easily recorded as male.



male



female?

The *hanzaki* world also appears to be suffering from the effect of an ageing population and low birth rate, and no matter how many larger *hanzaki* that are found, without any young babies, it is hard to say that breeding is actually taking place.

During breeding season, if one can spot an injured *hanzaki* (male *hanzaki* often fight to determine which is strongest and will become the leader) it indicates that there is a high chance of a breeding cave nearby.

Finding the caves is one of the biggest thrills when doing a survey.

It is also said that the fact that the strongest male stays in the breeding cave for half a year to protect the eggs is the *hanzaki* species most distinctive feature.

In recent surveys, we have also been able to microchip each *hanzaki* we find, which has been very useful.

When we re-catch them, we can see how much they've grown and how far they've moved, which is helping our research progress.

These results are displayed on the boards of the newly renovated "Hanzaki Center".

Yubara has been known as a habitat for the *hanzaki* for a very long time, and has a deep culture revolving around the animals-from the old tales of the *hanzaki*'s near extinction, to the Hanzaki Grand Shrine, and the Hanzaki festival.

Recent research displayed in the *Hanzaki Center* hope to show more of the world the charm of the *hanzaki*.



Japanese Giant Salamander Society
President Kazushi Kuwabara