

# For dormice, a bridge to reach safety

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HOKUTO, Yamanashi Prefecture— Why did the Japanese dormouse cross the road?

Because the city of Hokuto built it a bridge.

The city, which sprawls at the foot of the majestic Mount Yatsugatake, took the unusual move out of concern over the high numbers of near-threatened, small *yamane*, or Japanese dormouse, being killed trying to cross a road that cuts through their forest habitat.

So with the help of a local organization that promotes environmental education, the city slung a 2-million-yen dormouse bridge in late July across a stretch of city road in Oizumi, Hokuto.

And the good news is that dormice are using the safety crossing at night.

Buoyed by the success, a source connected with the project said, "We hope (similar crossings) will be implemented all over Japan."

*Yamane* are nocturnal mammals that spend most of their lives climbing among tree branches. The rodents measure a mere 8 centimeters, small enough to snuggle inside a person's palm.

The Japanese dormouse is designated a near-threatened species by the Environment Ministry.

The KEEP Dormouse Museum, operated by the Kiyosato Educational Experiment Project, an incorporated foundation based here, has been instrumental in protecting the endan-



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City authorities in Hokuto, Yamanashi Prefecture, slung a bridge across a road so dormice can cross it safely.

gered mammals.

Yet, it was difficult to prevent fatalities when the dormice came down from their trees and ventured across the city road that slices through the forested area.

So the city government installed a special crossing that hangs about 8 meters above the road. A triangular aluminum frame measuring 25 cm on each side was strung together with wire. The bottom was fitted with woven wire netting.

The 2-million-yen project was funded mostly by the city and the KEEP Dormouse Museum.

Since then, according to video footage from a surveillance camera, *yamane* dormice and also *hime-nezumi*, another small rodent, were seen crossing over the road each night.

Shusaku Minato, 55, curator of the



KEEP DORMOUSE MUSEUM

A "yamane" Japanese dormouse uses a special safety crossing at night.

KEEP Dormouse Museum, said: "I know these are times when all local governments are cutting down on public works projects. But I hope to see (crossings) installed in many locations around the nation."

For more information, call the museum at 0551-48-3577.

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