

Wildlife Accident Mitigation in Hokkaido, Japan

Submitted by Len Sielecki, Environmental Issues Analyst

It was an honour and a privilege to be invited by the Hokkaido Development Engineering Center (HDEC) to speak about the success of the Ministry's wildlife accident mitigation initiatives at the Wild Animal and Traffic Accidents Symposium of the 9th International Mammalogical Congress (IMC9). The symposium was held in Sapporo, on the Japanese island of Hokkaido, in August.



Deer warning sign on Hokkaido

HDEC was a most generous sponsor and host. At Sapporo's Chitose International Airport, I was met by Ms. Tomomi Tokuori, a very charming HDEC researcher who spoke English very well. In addition to ensuring my symposium arrangements were in order, Ms. Tokuori gave me an extensive tour of Sapporo, a dynamic, very clean, and modern city with over 1.8 million residents. My tour included visits to the Hokkaido University, the Hokkaido Shinto Shrine and the Sapporo Summer Festival, and Yodobashi Camera, an electronics superstore with the floor space of a football field.

Before the symposium, I gave a special presentation to HDEC staff and was introduced to Dr. Katsuhiro Kumagai, Director General of HDEC. As is Japanese custom, Dr. Kumagai and I exchanged gifts from our respective organizations. We spoke about the differences and similarities between Hokkaido and British Columbia and Dr. Kumagai introduced me to "Bushido", the values of Japanese society. It was an honour to represent the Ministry and meet Dr. Kumagai, fondly referred to as "KK" by his staff.



Changeable deer warning sign



Downtown Sapporo

Later, at the HDEC banquet held for symposium speakers, I was invited to sit across from Dr. Kumagai. It was a great honour for me to spend the evening speaking with Dr. Kumagai, an accomplished professional civil engineer, whose achievements include the Hakucho Bridge, one of the largest steel suspension bridges in the world. I was impressed when Dr. Kumagai told me he had learned to speak English by listening to lessons on the radio. His English was very good.

Wildlife researchers came from all over the world to attend the IMC9 symposium. HDEC staff did an incredible job organizing the symposium as it was the best I have attended. My two presentations went well and one of my papers was chosen as the lead article in the symposium proceedings. My success was due to Mike Kent for providing me the history of the Ministry's wildlife accident mitigation efforts; Bev Druten-Blais, Wayne Yee, Ed Sabadash and Gavin McLeod for digital and graphics assistance; and Dirk Nyland, Ed Miska, Richard Voyer and Sharlie Huffman for critiquing my papers and presentation materials.

After the symposium, I was taken on an extensive tour of Hokkaido's wildlife exclusion systems by Dr. Fumihiro Hara and his research colleague Ms. Misako Noro. Dr. Hara, an engineer and the director of

continued on **page 19**

continued from page 18

HDEC's Regional Policy Research Laboratory, is the most accomplished wildlife accident mitigation expert I have ever met. The newly constructed Shari Eco-Road installation, developed under his guidance, is the newest and most advanced wildlife exclusion system in the world. Following Japanese engineering tradition, this installation combines leading edge



Shari Eco-Road wildlife underpass

innovation and high quality workmanship with beauty. It was nice to see a highly effective wildlife exclusion system look so attractive.

Hokkaido's need to deal with deer-related motor vehicle accidents is directly

related to success of Japan's wildlife preservation efforts, especially those with Ezo deer which were nearly extinct in the late 1900s. On Hokkaido, Ezo deer now number over 200,000 and the herd is estimated to be doubling in size every five years. At first, Ms. Noro helped me spot Ezo deer. She had the keenest eye I have ever seen and could pick out an Ezo deer in a dense roadside thicket from a minivan traveling at 100 km/hr. Soon, I found Ezo deer everywhere, from ocean beaches to highway rights-of-way, in farm fields and small towns, and on the outskirts of Sapporo.

Hokkaido is a very beautiful island with spectacular natural scenery. Summer brings temperatures ranging from the

high 20Cs to the low 30Cs. Winter is very much a part of life on Hokkaido and can bring temperatures as low as -40C and heavy snow. Snow sheds and permanent snow fences are fixtures on highways



Shari Eco-Road wildlife exclusion fencing

throughout the island. Many houses have steep peaked metal roofs to handle heavy snow loads. SUVs are everywhere.

Although the days were very long and distances traveled were great, my tour of wildlife exclusion systems included many cultural and culinary highlights and I enjoyed the company and camaraderie of Dr. Hara and Ms. Noro. I visited Aoyama-bettei, a beautiful traditional Japanese guest house, the steaming volcano Mount Usu, the renowned glassworks of Otura and the spectacular Shiretoko National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Throughout Japan, Hokkaido is famous for its noodles, beer, whiskey, wild salmon, beef and dairy products. While on the road, whenever we stopped for gas, I loaded up on ice cream bars. Hokkaido ice cream is delicious.

I went to Japan expecting a compact, highly urbanized country with ladies in kimonos and sushi bars. Instead, on Hokkaido, I discovered a vast and beautiful landscape of mountains and valleys, large ranches and dairy farms, wide open highways and wild animals. This was definitely not the Japan I expected. It was a very pleasant surprise.



Yeeeeeeeeehaw! Git Along Little Hot-Doggies!

MoT's Properties and Business Management Posse in Victoria wrangled up a whopping \$528 for PECSF at their Rootin' Tootin' BBQ Hot Dog Sale in late September.

