

Invasive squirrels surge in east Japan's Fujisawa as captures hit record high

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This photo provided by the Fujisawa Municipal Government shows a Formosan squirrel, listed as a "designated invasive alien species" in Japan.

FUJISAWA, Kanagawa -- The population of Formosan squirrels has surged in this eastern Japan city, with consultations and captures in fiscal 2025 reaching seven times the level of three years earlier, the highest on record.

The Fujisawa Municipal Government is installing and lending traps as crop damage reports also rise.

The Formosan squirrel, characterized by its gray-brown color and long tail, measures about 40 centimeters including the tail. Native to Taiwan and Southeast Asia, it is listed as a "designated invasive

alien species" in Japan, meaning keeping or releasing it into the wild is in principle prohibited.

According to the city's environmental conservation division, the number of captured Formosan squirrels reached 48 in fiscal 2022. The figure then rose to 83 in fiscal 2023 and 156 in fiscal 2024, before surging to 332 in fiscal 2025. Consultations also increased from 32 in fiscal 2022 to 216 in fiscal 2025.

Because of the squirrel's strong reproductive capacity and the consistent rise in consultations, city officials believe "its population within the city has grown substantially." The increase in traps under the pest control plan formulated by Kanagawa Prefecture in fiscal 2024 may also have contributed to

the higher number of captures.

In the prefecture, Formosan squirrels first became established in the wild on the Miura Peninsula, and in recent years their range has expanded to Yokohama and the Shonan area. Under the prefecture's pest control plan, Fujisawa is designated as a "range-expansion area." In the city, the squirrels are believed to mainly inhabit the southern and eastern districts, but have recently begun spreading to the north.

In addition to raiding crops, the squirrels have damaged electric wires and entered attics. They also threaten the ecosystem of native Japanese squirrels, which has prompted the city to ramp up trapping operations by increasing installations and lending cages to the public.

A city official from the division said, "We aim to strengthen our trapping efforts while drawing on expert advice and push forward with countermeasures."

(Japanese original by Keiichiro Sawa, Shonan Local Bureau)