

## From the frontline of environmental education <Part 5>

### KEEP Association

#### KEEP (Kiyosato Education Experiment Project) Association

The KEEP Association started its environmental education activities in 1983. Currently, it runs the Yamane (Japanese dormice, *Glirulus japonicus*) Museum and Yatsugatake Nature Center, which offers a variety of nature programs at the St Francis Discovery Center, and nurtures guides and leaders at the Forester's School.

#### As the Green Entrance to the Woods

The Yatsugatake Nature Center offers many displays and program to enable the visitors to learn about Yatsugatake's nature and culture while having fun. The center is aiming to be literarily the "Green Entrance to the Woods" so that visitors are instantly interested in forests. In addition to this introduction role, the center has stepped up its capacity to offer a variety of paid residential programs such as the Yamane School, the Forest Therapy course, and the Enjoy Forest Weekend Patrol.

#### Collaboration with Private Companies and Schools

Apart from these various programs, the KEEP Association can sometimes also provide tailor-made programs for specific companies and schools. Such collaborative programs with private companies are often an integral part of their employee volunteer program or part of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) or employee training. Collaborative programs for schools are largely part of their nature studies or outdoor schools.

An important point with this kind of collaborative program is to develop a program based on clear objectives that are thoroughly discussed and agreed through an initial meeting. Moreover, it is also important to increase impact of the programs by close post-program follow-up, and by linking the program with actual actions. They sometimes deliver lectures at school as post-program study.

#### Human Resource Development Program

In addition to the implementation of these environmental education programs, the KEEP Association works to nurture future leaders who can conduct the programs. The "leaders" are categorized in three types, namely an actor (interpreter), a script writer (planner) and a producer (project manager), and training is conducted in participatory workshop format.

Further to the leader training, in order to nurture future leaders, the KEEP Association also accepts interns, fostering human resource development through one-year On the Job Training (OJT).

#### Interpretation to Communicate

A KEEP Association's nature observation outing is not a passive session whereby they teach the name of observed species to participants, saying "This bird's name is XXX." Rather the outings aim to create opportunities to learn about the wonder of nature and how to strengthen association with nature, through first hand experiences fully stimulating and utilizing the five senses of participants. By doing this, the outings provide the participants with a trigger/an impetus for concrete actions to tackle environmental issues by gaining awareness of the issues and identifying entry points for solving them.

Therefore, the interpreters are expected to be able to plant a strong message in the participants' minds through the outing experience, responding empathetically to their discoveries and excitement. For this, the interpreters cannot be simply nature guides. What is required is for the interpreters to have good communication skills to be able to connect between nature and people and between individuals. The KEEP Association is working towards nurturing such interpreters through its operations.

**"It is not half so important to 'know' as to 'feel'."**  
(From *The Sense of Wonder*)



Entrance to the Yatsugatake Nature Center



Guided walk to learn about forests



Training course on nature interpretation