

Caution! MAMUSHI Snakes near the Tama River

The other day, I asked several students the following questions:

“What comes to mind when you hear the word reptiles?” and

“What kind of image do you have of reptiles?”

The students gave answers such as “snakes, lizards, turtles, and crocodiles,” and also impressions like “scary,” “I don't like them,” and “I'm not very familiar with them.”

As for me, I don't feel very scared of reptiles. In fact, I rather like them. When I was a child, I always felt very happy when I encountered a gecko (家守: guardian of the house) and I thought it was very cute. The Japanese word for gecko is written with the characters meaning “guardian of the house,” which reflects the belief that geckos protect our homes. By contrast, newts(井守: guardian of the well), which are often confused with geckos, are written with characters meaning “guardian of the well” and are amphibians.

On warm spring days, I have sometimes seen Japanese rat snakes (Aodaisho), measuring over two meters long, basking in the sun while coiled around tree branches. If they were within reach, I even stroked them or gently pressed their skin with my fingers. Neither geckos nor Aodaisho pose any danger to humans. Rather, they are animals that are beneficial to our daily lives. I encourage you to look into how they help us. Of course, even a mild-mannered Aodaisho would probably become angry and defend itself if it were bullied or handled roughly.

Now, what I would like to inform you about this time is the MAMUSHI, Japanese pit viper. Unlike the Aodaisho, the mamushi is a very timid snake. An Aodaisho usually does not react much even if a person touches it. However, because the mamushi is so timid, it feels threatened when a human tries to touch it and may strike instantly. In addition,



A gecko photographed at my home

it has fairly strong venom. The venom of the mamushi is said to be two to three times more potent than that of the habu snake. However, because the mamushi is smaller than the habu, the amount of venom injected is relatively small, and as a result, bites are often less severe than those from a habu.

So where can mamushi be found? In fact, they live quite commonly in the areas around us. Mamushi are said to inhabit riversides, grassy areas, and fields in Fuchu City. In particular, they are often found along the Tama River. They are most active from May to October. In 2017, there was an accident in which an elementary school child in Komae City was bitten. Quite some time ago, there was an incident in which a junior high school student in Fuchu City caught a Mamushi and secretly took it home and kept it without telling their family. Unfortunately, the student was bitten.

It is also important to note that Mamushi are not found only on riverbanks. They are good swimmers and may also be present in the water, so we must be cautious in and around rivers as well.

What should you do if you are bitten by a Mamushi?

Identifying whether the snake was a Mamushi is important, but regardless of the species, if you are bitten by any snake, you must immediately call 119 and be transported to a hospital by ambulance.

A Mamushi is a relatively small snake, usually no longer than 60 centimeters. It has a thick body, a triangular head, and distinctive dark brown coin-shaped patterns along its back. If the snake can be brought to the hospital, identification is easy; however, in most cases the snake quickly escapes, making identification difficult.

Whether venom has been injected is determined based on the bite marks, symptoms such as pain and swelling, and the person's overall condition. When two parallel sharp fang marks are observed, a Mamushi bite is strongly suspected. Local symptoms such as pain and swelling are important for diagnosis. These symptoms usually appear within about 30 minutes. If no symptoms appear within that time, it is likely that the bite was non-venomous or that only a small amount of venom was injected.

Characteristic features include an electric shock-like pain immediately after the bite and localized swelling that spreads relatively quickly toward the center of the body (for example, from the finger toward the hand).

At the hospital, treatment includes suction of the venom and administration of medication. In the past, antivenom serum for Mamushi bites was commonly used, but it is rarely used today. Currently, a medication called cepharanthine is administered. This drug is derived from *Stephania cepharantha*, a plant native to Taiwan, and originates from a folk remedy traditionally used by indigenous people living in the highlands of Taiwan for mamushi bites.

In any case, prompt treatment and careful medical observation are essential.

ALT (Assistant Language Teacher) を活用して英訳しています。
The English translations are prepared with the support of our
Assistant Language Teacher (ALT).

Principal


Yasuhiro Takashio



八中だより



第4号

令和8年5月15日

府中市立

府中第八中学校

熱中症に
注意!

〒182-0035
府中市四谷一丁目二八二七
電話 〇四二(三六四)一八八一

〈学校住所・電話番号〉

〈在籍生徒数〉 一学年231名、二学年249名、三学年218名
全校生徒数698名

★八中生の「あいさつ」はずばらしい、という声が多
数届いています。