

Summer 2026 Special Exhibition

The History of Human-Animal Interaction in Ishikawa Prefecture



【Overview】

Since ancient times, people have had mutual relationships with a wide variety of animals. Japan's bear troubles in recent years are a microcosm of the way that our approach to wildlife, and nature more broadly, has been called into question amid changes to people's living environments and habits, alongside the increasingly severe effects of global climate change.

This exhibition features items from the museum's collection, spanning history, folklore, and fine arts, as well as other related items from Ishikawa and beyond, all with a focus on human-animal interaction. By tracing back through history, for both humans and other creatures, we can explore possibilities for how we will interact in the future.

【Exhibition Details and Main Exhibits】

Prologue : Difficulties with Human–Animal Interaction, and Hopes for the Future

At the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of History, animal specimens serve as testimony to human history and as guiding indicators for the future, due to the way that, throughout human history, we have been unable to survive without our connections to other living creatures. To get a sense of what the future holds in store for us, we must explore human history through the lens of animals.



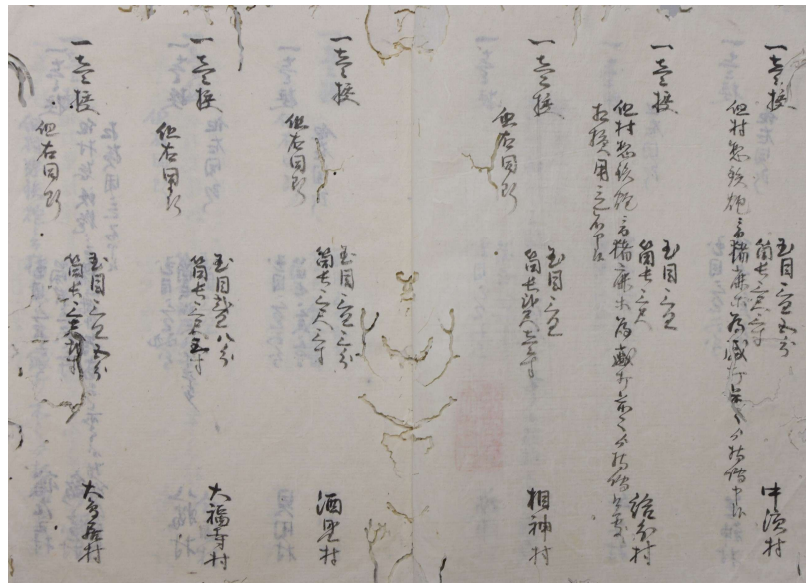
Japanese Wolf Head Skull, Natural Monument Designated by Ueda City, from the Collection of Ueda High School, Nagano Prefecture



Taxidermy of the Last Crested Ibis in the Main Island of Japan, from the Collection of Ishikawa prefectural Museum of History

Section1: When Animals Bring Misfortune

At its core, the word “pest” simply refers to any unwanted creature that causes problems for humans. Back in the Edo period (1603–1868), for instance, pests in Japan included boars and deer that would trample and ruin crops and farmland, as well as locusts that would eat rice plants, so people did everything they could to try to get rid of them. Wolves served as natural predators for these boars and deer; however, once wolves showed up in human villages, they also posed a threat to people, cattle, and horses. When animal activity or population sizes would change, it could affect people’s living environments and productivity, sometimes even leading to catastrophe.



Records documenting firearm ownership in the villages of what is now Shika Town, Ishikawa, 1855, from the Collection of Ishikawa prefectural Museum of History



Matchlockgun, Meiji Era (19th and 20th Century), from the Collection of Ishikawa prefectural Museum of History

Section 2: Reaping the Benefits of Animals

Over the years, people have used virtually every possible living thing as a food source, short of fellow humans. By our estimates, this includes some 620 different species of land and sea creatures. Ishikawa is largely surrounded by the sea, with Mt. Hakusan in the distance beyond the lake-dotted plains, leading the region to develop a distinctive food culture built on the natural abundance of the local ecosystems. Animals also played roles in everyday life and people's livelihoods. For example, bears were valuable for their pelts, as well as for their gallbladders, which were prized in traditional medicine. Likewise, silkworms provided silk threads, whales provided oil that could be used as a pest repellent in rice fields, and sardines could be used as fertilizer.

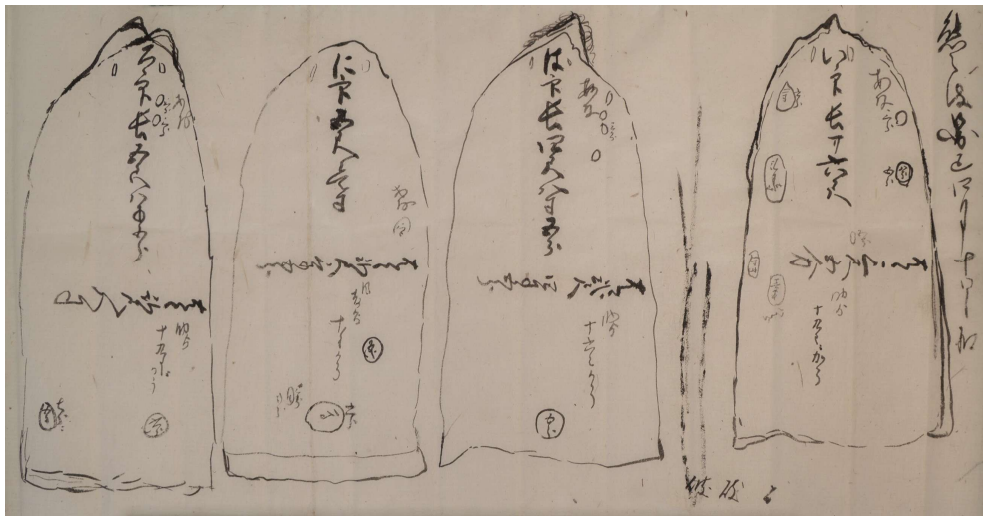


Illustration of Bear Pelts Given as Offerings to the Shogunate Government , 1785, from a Private Collection



Album of Illustrations Depicting the Noto Region's Fishing Industry , 1838, Cultural Property Designated by Ishikawa Prefecture, from the Collection of Ishikawa prefectural Museum of History

Section 3: Animals as a Source of Labor

Since ancient times, people have used domesticated animals for labor. Horses have played an especially vital role in human history, serving as a valuable way to speed up travel and shipping, in addition to their uses in war and agriculture.

During the Edo period (1603–1868), the Kaga Domain (in what is now Ishikawa and part of Toyama) sent envoys as far and wide as the Tohoku region of northeastern Japan in their search for excellent horses. Then, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, horses came to be prized for the ways they could be used in war; the government aggressively promoted horse breeding, and even honored horses through funeral services and official commendations.



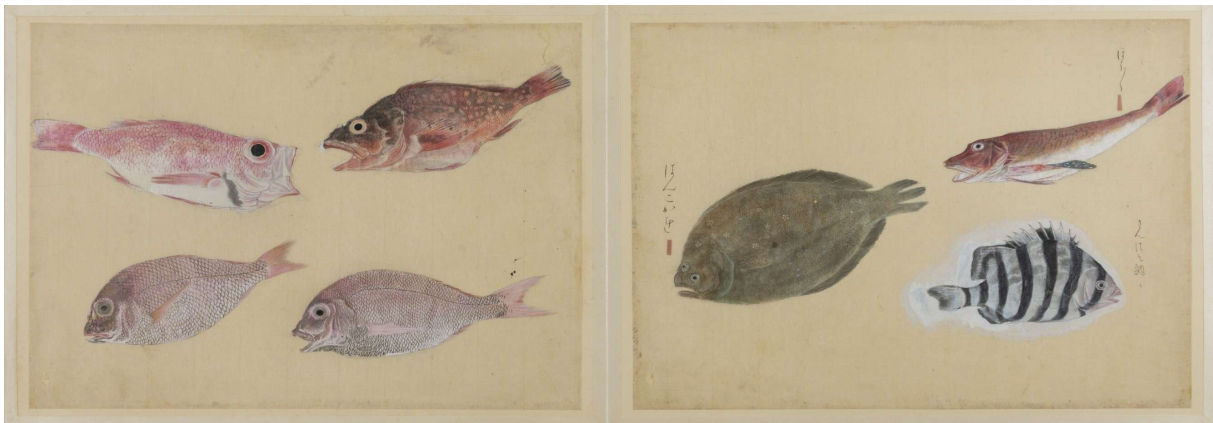
Stagecoach Advertisement, 1692, from a Private Collection



Horse Horn, from a Private Collection

Section 4: The Study of Living Things

When people happen upon living things, there is a natural tendency to want to learn more about them: What is it called? How does it behave? Are there more of it around? Can we eat it? During the Edo period (1603–1868) the field of herbalism — studying natural substances for medicinal purposes — flourished, as did “local product studies,” a branch of herbalism focused on the useful local products of each region. The Kaga Domain (in what is now Ishikawa and part of Toyama) was known for its local passion for these fields, and a number of academic writings and illustrated guides were produced with support from the domain government.



Sketches for an Illustrated Guide of Fish Caught off the Coast of Present-day Uozu, Toyama, by Ueda Kyuei, 1783-84, from a Private Collection

Section 5: Animals and the Spiritual World

Since ancient times, animals have been a familiar presence in the context of prayer in everyday life in Japan. Buddhism has particularly strong ties to animals: it is said that Queen Maya, the mother of Buddha Siddhartha Gautama, dreamed that a white elephant entered her womb when she became pregnant with him. Animals are depicted in many ways throughout Buddhist art, playing key roles in stories, serving deities and Buddhas, or even serving as a symbol of these deities themselves. These associations of animals with deities and Buddhas served as ways to help further enhance their spiritual significance.



Nirvana of the Buddha, by Sasaki Sengen, Edo Era (19th Century), from the Collection of Ishikawa prefectural Museum of History

Epilogue: An Age of Revitalization for Animals

Animal conservation and protection movements began in earnest in the postwar era, with the crested ibis serving as a symbol of these efforts in Japan. Yoshio Muramoto (b. 1925 in Hakui, Ishikawa) has long been a leader in crested ibis conservation. In 2026, crested ibises raised in captivity were released into the wild in the Noto Peninsula of northern Ishikawa, their last natural habitat on Japan's main island of Honshu before they went extinct in the wild in Japan. Whether these birds can successfully be reintroduced into the wild is entirely a matter of human efforts. This project to bring back the crested ibis is just one example of people's endeavors to reexamine our human lifestyles from the perspective of other animals.



Crested Ibis Conservation Campaign Poster, 1959, from the Collection of Ishikawa prefectural Museum of History

Dates: Sat., Jul. 25 to Sun., Aug. 30, 2025

Hours: 9:00 to 17:00 (last admission at 16:30)

The exhibition room will be open until 19:00 at the following days (last admission at 18:30).
Sat., Jul. 25, Fly., Jul. 31, Sat., Aug. 1, Fly., Aug. 7, Sat., Aug. 8, Fly., Aug. 14, Sat., Aug. 15

Open 7 days a week during the exhibition period

Venue: Special Exhibition Room and Project Exhibition Room

Admission: Adults ¥800 (¥640), university and professional school students ¥640 (¥510)

- Free admission for high school students and younger
 - Prices shown in parentheses above are price per person for groups of 20 or more, or prices for visitors 65 and older.
 - Free admission upon presentation of disability certification or Mirairo ID, for holder and one accompanying person.
- Additional fee required for admission to the Kaga-Honda Museum.
- Electronic tickets are also available (with no designated date/time).

Electronic Tickets :

- Admission: Adults ¥800, university and professional school students ¥640

Notes

- Discounts (such as for visitors 65 and older) are not available with electronic tickets. To take advantage of discounts, please purchase tickets at the counter on the day of your visit.
- Electronic tickets have no designated date or time, and there are no guarantees for admission time slots.

Organizer: Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of History

Special Support: The Hokkoku Shimbun

Support: Kanazawa City Board of Education
NHK Kanazawa Broadcasting Station