



## 2021 TOP 100 GOOD PRACTICE STORY

**Title of the Story:** Sado Island's Ecology and Biodiversity Project

**Destination Name:** *(include any state, province or region)*

Sado City

**Country:** Japan

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**Position:** General Affairs Department manager

**Nomination Category:** *(Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)*

*Please find detailed information for the categories below in the Top 100 training module 'Good Practice Story'.*

- Localizing the destination supply chain
- Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
- Culture & Communities
- Environment & Climate
- Nature & Ecotourism
- Tourism Reset & Recovery

*Find detailed instructions for submitting good practices in the Top 100 training module "Good Practice Story".*

*Should you have any questions on your submission please refer to our FAQ page or contact [top100@greendestinations.org](mailto:top100@greendestinations.org)*

# DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

*Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.*

## Issues faced

When Japanese people hear about Sado Island, the first image that comes to mind is the Toki (Crested Ibis). The “Toki” attract many visitors to the island. They can now be seen daily flying through the skies all over Sado. These birds were once common all over Japan too, however their numbers drastically diminished due to over-hunting, industrialization, deforestation, environmental pollution and chemical usage in farming. In 1981, the last five remaining Toki were put into captivity, in order to breed them. Sadly, this failed and the last Japanese Toki died in 2003.

In 1999, a pair of Toki was given to Japan by China, and were successfully bred on Sado Island. Japan and China continued to cooperate together in breeding Toki in both countries. More pairs were sent to Japan, and in return hatched chicks were sent to China. These efforts were a success and in 2008, 10 Toki were released into the wild here on Sado.

An ideal environment for them had to be created around the rice fields, where their food can be found, and a new system had to be put in place. This required the cooperation of the farmers. Unfortunately, releasing Toki into the wild brought its own set of problems. Toki are particularly sensitive creatures. Because they could now be observed living in their natural habitat, many tourists and bird lovers flocked to Sado. This was very welcome, but by attempting to get the best photographs some tourists would make loud noises to make them fly, drive too close, and even chase them.

## Methods, steps and tools applied

New rules had to be established for the viewing of Toki. Sado City devised the “Coexisting with Toki Rules,” a list of rules for the public to read and understand. They were published online and put up in the Toki-no-Mori Park, a facility for the breeding and viewing of Toki in captivity. A group was also created called the “Toki Guide Group.” Toki guides take local children and tourists around Toki’s habitats, introducing the rules and explaining how to coexist with them.

Local Sado Tourism Information Centers also rent out electric bicycles to people wanting to view these sound-sensitive birds, in a safe and environmentally clean way. In a particularly hilly area called Ogi, electric mountain bikes were made available. Another reason behind the bike schemes is to provide support for the public transportation in an environmentally clean way. Ogi itself is a main tourist area, attracting lots of people to the island. It is where “Shukunegi,” a traditional building preservation district, can be found, along with unique tub fishing boats.

## Key success factors



With the combined efforts of the Ministry of Environment and Niigata Prefecture, the “Wild Return of Toki Vision” was established, a set of guidelines and plans to create an ideal habitat for the successful future of non-captive Toki. At the same time on Sado, the “Certification System for the Rice of Living with Japanese Crested Ibis” was founded. This included the biodiversity conservation five-factor farming method, which reduced the use of chemicals and encouraged a more traditional approach to farming and other environmentally friendly techniques. Rice grown through this way was awarded the “Certification System for the Rice of Living with Japanese Crested Ibis” certified mark, becoming a nationally recognized brand. Any product containing this rice, such as sweets or rice flour etc., carries this branding. So, these methods resulted in creating not just a cleaner, safe environment but also a new economic cycle on the island.

### Lessons learned

Many new methods had to be implemented for this all to be a success. The cooperation of the farmers and local people was vital. Farmers, especially, had to change from their modern convenient labor-saving techniques to more traditional, labor intensive ones. Over 50% of the chemicals they were using had to be reduced. No chemicals could be used to weed around the paddy fields, it all had to be done by hand again. As imagined, this wasn't an ideal situation for the hundreds of farmers. However, through the education of elementary school students, forest studies conducted by the university, hands-on activities for tourists, and environmental meetings for local people, the way of thinking gradually changed. This also helped change the attitudes of tourists.

### Results, achievements and recognitions

The new scheme started in 2008 with 7.2% of the whole crop acreage and 3.6% of the rice farmers participating. This rose to a peak of 24.4% acreage with participation by 11% of farmers in 2012. The majority of farmers are older people, amid Japan's aging population -- yet the average of whole crop acreage has remained at around 20%. (In 2020, 9.2% farmers had joined the scheme.) This has become a major farming method. Due to this, the natural environment has greatly improved and a rich biodiversity exists. Most of the rice fields are in the central, flat area of the island, however, the method has also been incorporated into very small mountain terrace fields. The terrace rice farms were first made to cope with a sudden influx of people after gold was discovered about 200 years ago. Currently, there are over 450 Toki living in the wild on the island. They have become a familiar sight and the symbol of Sado. The Toki-no-Mori Park used to welcome fewer than 100,000 visitors a year. But after the successful breeding program, this rose to more than 200,000.

Before -- but especially after -- gold was discovered, many people from all walks of life and from all over Japan arrived. They brought with them their own traditions and folk art that transformed into ritual ceremonies on Sado. This has all culminated into Sado's unique culture and deep traditions, with rice farming being intrinsic to it all. Between spring and autumn, rituals, such as “Oni Daiko” or Noh theater can often be heard daily across the island with each area and even village performing their own styles, praying for a bountiful rice harvest.

In 2011, Sado was awarded the first Globally Important Agricultural Heritage (GIAHS) in Japan. This was earned through the links among biodiversity, eco-friendly farming methods and the economic cycle. It



was enhanced by the stunning scenery around the paddy fields and by preserving a traditional, ancient farming culture and community.

Safe produce, beautiful views, a deep culture practiced in daily life are part of what has attracted people from all over the world to Sado.

### Additional references

*Provide links to further information. Pictures and videos should be available for download either from Youtube, Vimeo or other Cloud-based (Google/ One Drive) download URL.*

The History of the Toki  
Natural Environment and Biodiversity (Ministry of the Environment)  
Sado Island World Agricultural Heritage Site (GIAHS)  
Creating a township to live with Toki  
Rental bicycles (e-bikes)  
Number of visitors to Toki no Mori Park  
Certified Rice Logo Mark  
  
Certified Rice Products  
  
Articles on Sado Island by Foreign Media

