

Black Bear (maybe Japanese, maybe not)

Grist had a really interesting [story](#) at the end of last month about [Japanese black bears](#) — or [black bears](#) if you prefer — which have a tenuous hold on survival. What makes this story particularly interesting is that it is a preview of a world in which the idea of the “natural” has become problematic. Japan has some remote, relatively wild forests, but far more area in tree plantations or in rural areas that have been abandoned by an increasingly urban population. As *Grist* puts it,

Unfortunately, much of the damage from development and loss of natural forest has already been done, so creating large, unbroken nature preserves will likely be impossible. Japan must instead invent ways to protect wildlife even where wilderness is closely intertwined with developed areas.

Japan is a small, heavily populated country — the whole world is not likely to replicate this situation. But between now and mid-century, as populations grow and economies expand, more and more places will look like that. We need to think hard about what it means to preserve nature in areas with such heavy human imprints. But beyond the philosophical questions, we need to find biological space for animals like the Japanese black bear.