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Wildlife conservation as a social issue and PhDs' potential contribution to 'wicked problems'

Society is full of complex issues that require expertise to solve. Many of these issues are 'wicked problems', which are difficult to define and solve due to their multifaceted nature. Unlike regions struggling with deforestation due to development, Japan is in a period of recovery from historical over-hunting and habitat loss, leading to an increase in medium to large mammals such as Japanese macaques. This re-expansion has led to animal damage problems, represented by agricultural damage. The problem is multifaceted, involving elements of primary industry sustainability, ageing society, depopulation, animal welfare and land conservation. While methodologies exist to mitigate these conflicts, the practical implementation of these solutions is often hampered by community dynamics and conflicting stakeholder interests. The crux of the conservation problem lies not with the animals, but with human systems and attitudes.

To tackle such wicked problems, a collaborative approach involving experts and stakeholders from different sectors is essential. As a case study of wicked problems, this presentation will focus on the conservation challenges faced by Japanese macaques and pig-tailed macaques. It will also present examples of interdisciplinary efforts at the Co Design Centre and the Cross-Boundary Innovation (CBI) programme, where researchers and students from a variety of disciplines, including the presenter, have engaged in addressing societal problems. On the basis of these examples, I would like to demonstrate the effectiveness of a multi-perspective approach to problems and the pedagogical benefits of such educational programmes.

