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Distributional change of the Japanese squirrel (*Sciurus lis*) for ten years in Chiba Prefecture, central Japan

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This study reports on the distributional change of the Japanese squirrel, *Sciurus lis*, in Chiba Prefecture, investigated during the years 2009–2011. The investigated areas correspond to those surveyed in 2001–2003 according to the minimum unit of 1 x 1 km grid-square (the third grid-square designated by the Ministry of the Environments). The presence of the Japanese squirrel was confirmed mainly based on bite marks on pine cones. In the northern part of Chiba Prefecture, the occurrence of the animal has been recorded in 19 of 25 sites (24 percent decrease) that were investigated in the previous survey 2001–2003. In the eastern part of Chiba Prefecture, the occurrence of the species has been confirmed only in one site in Choshi City, although the species was found in sites in the previous survey. In the southern part, the occurrence of the animal has been recorded in 36 of 57 sites (37 percent decrease) which were investigated in the previous survey, but newly recorded from 15 sites. In the previous study, decline of squirrels in the northern portion was emphasized, but also, in this report shows a similar status in southern part. This study suggests a trend of decline of the species in the northern part of Chiba Prefecture, including the northeastern part. Pine forests

area has decreased in the northern part an estimated 70-90% from 1985 to 2009, and this could be a factor of the decline of species. On the other hand, although the southern region has much forest area compared with the north and continuity is also maintained, decline of pine forest has been advancing longer than in the north. It is necessary to clarify the ecology of the squirrel in the southern region in which there are few pine forests and evergreen broad-leaved tree forest dominates.