

水辺の幸

Mizube no Sachi

Gift of Waterfront

Illustrated Handbook of

Edible Plants and Animals Indigenous to the Mekong River Basin



Nagao Natural Environment Foundation

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Mizube no Sachi

Nature's blessing of food for the living things around riparian areas

Since 2007, our team has done research and technical transfers on conservation of local natural environment in Mekong river basin. Research area is the basin in Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. To this day, people in this region depends largely their food source on the riparian lives in paddy fields, rivers, and lakes. In local markets, one sees abundance of small aquatic creatures such as freshwater fish and crabs, and both riparian and land insects and plants. They are also served on daily meals of local people. Such living resource is differentiated from commercially harvested sources since they do not require large amount of time, labor, and monetary investment in order to harvest them. Therefore they may not be categorized as a means of earning a living; however, they are essential part of people's daily lives in terms of providing food.

The staple of people along Mekong River is rice, and field of rice paddy is a common landscape in this area. Many of the non-professionally harvested living sources depend their habitat on paddy field around villages and nearby water sources. This landscape and concept of coexistence of lives are familiar with the study team, which is from Japan. Japan is known in ancient time, as "country of abundant rice crop". Through the study, we have reconfirmed the uniqueness of rice paddy from natural the resources point of view. We decided to call the resources "*Mizube no Sachi*." *Mizube no* means riparian origin, and *Sachi* means blessings in Japanese. In this context, the blessing is food. We wanted to express appreciation for the lives of organisms which exist as food, so we called them not just food but "blessing" from Mother Nature. This appreciation for the nature represents a feeling that something Japanese have ever since our ancestors' time.

Mizube no Sachi includes not only wild life but also alien species which were brought in by people and have been utilized in many ways. It also includes plants that are casually cultivated in short period while the river banks are dry during seasonal water level change. As a result, the list of *Mizube no Sachi* included large variety of products. This is not a scientifically defined term..

At the end of research, the list contained more than 500 species. From the length of the list, it is clear that people of Mekong River basin utilize 1)many fish, 2)process insect as food, and 3)use various plants including trees as food. Some kinds of species differ in some areas and countries, but those three points are common among culture in Mekong River basin in terms of utilizing living things.

Mizube no Sachi should play a central role when thinking of conserving local biodiversity in Mekong River basin. Because in order to sustain biodiversity, it is important to know individual organism; of its appearance, name and characteristic. This field guide book is a photo album that recorded riparian lives as clearly and comprehensively as possible. It made it possible to understand an ambiguous concept of biodiversity by showing evidences of just how diverse the lives are in the area.

It is our hope that this would help people to understand the importance of biodiversity, and that would lead to thought and activities to conserve local natural resources. It is our heartfelt wish that rich natural resource and people's lives along Mekong would be conserved in the future.



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First, we recognized that lives of people in Mekong river basin largely depended on utilizing resource from waterfront. And we came to think that determining the object to be conserved should be the priority. This thinking lead to an idea to make an illustrated handbook of all the things of *Mizube no Sachi*. In each country of the research area there are products unique to some areas and those found commonly throughout the region, but they are often called in different names in each region. So the primary purpose of this guide is to share common knowledge of all the collection of resources in Mekong river basin.

Secondary purpose is to bring awareness of people that *Mizube no Sachi* tend to be looked as things granted or too trivial to be noted; however, it cannot exist without healthy natural environment. Therefore, in order to continue to utilize *Mizube no Sachi*, we must realize it is very important to conserve one’s surrounding natural environment. These are the goals our mission and the purposes of this guide book.

We acknowledge that this guide needs more work to achieve the intended purposes. It is our sincere hope that this guide will be a springboard for further advancement of environmental conservation.

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