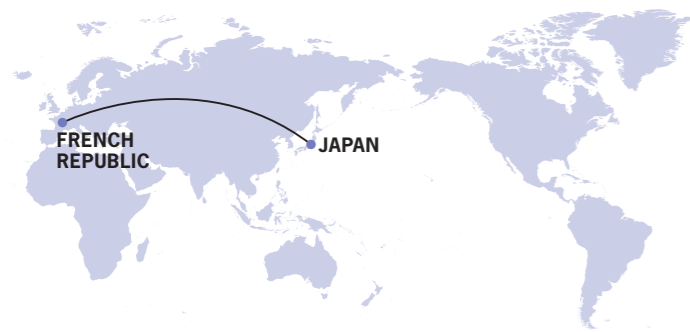


Green Birds from Tokyo Take Flight in Paris

Flocks of “green birds” hatched in Tokyo have been flying across the oceans. Serving as captain of the “Paris flock” is a Japanese woman, Yoshiko Inai.



Shortly before 10:00 a.m., on a Saturday with rainy skies clearing, Yoshiko Inai is waiting at a bench in front of a park in the 14th arrondissement of Paris. On the bench at the assembly point is a set of cleaning equipment: green vests and gloves, vinyl trash bags, and large tongs.

Today is the monthly tidy-up day. Some have seen the announcement on the website, others have seen messages that spread through SNS, and now they form a group that includes both regulars of several years standing, as well as hesitant newbies. The event takes an hour: volunteers choose their own paths through the area, picking up litter that catches the eye. Today almost 40 people are involved.

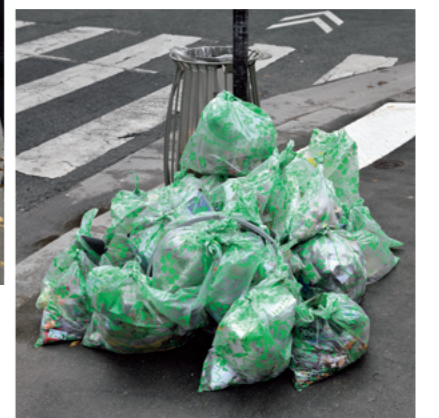
Hatched in Tokyo in 2003, the Green Bird project is a volunteer organization that removes litter from the streets. The movement, starting from the concept of “cleaning your city can bring beauty into your heart” has spread, first through Japan and now worldwide. The Paris team dates from 2007. Inai first participated after reading an article on the Internet in 2009, and has served as leader since 2013. “Just as I was becoming frustrated by all the litter cluttering the streets, I learned about the movement and jumped right in. Everything looks so much better after being tidied up, and seeing the results creates good cheer. Making a civic



Left: Braving cloudy skies after a rain, almost 40 people gathered for the November cleanup day. Below: All the litter collected during the hour is piled in a single location. By prior arrangement, a pick-up crew from the city collects the trash soon afterwards.



Carefully clearing away cigarette butts and candy wrappers. Their curiosity aroused, passers-by often strike up a conversation.



contribution also brings a certain feeling of satisfaction.”

An important part of the leader’s role involves communicating with the headquarters in Japan, and uploading information about monthly activities to the main Green Bird website in the form of a blog. Determining the monthly cleanup site is another important duty. Areas with heavy pedestrian traffic and lots of litter tend to be chosen as sites, and for a good reason. When a cleanup action is in progress, passers-by make comments. The attitude of “We pay taxes, so cleaning the streets should be the city’s job” is pervasive among Parisians, who are not accustomed to seeing litter being picked up by people other than employees of the city. Inai says, “We are often asked, ‘Are you trying to take away someone’s job?’ or ‘Is

someone paying you?’ But when I explain that we’re volunteers, they respond favorably.” She continues, “People litter every day, so picking up once a month is not going to keep the streets clean. The goal of our activity is not to keep the streets clean.”

Clean streets create positive feelings, but littering is shameful. As that attitude becomes more widespread, people will gradually change their behavior. This is what Inai hopes will change the streets. As a way of spreading this attitude, the volunteers are like a mirror. And that, Inai feels, is the significance of what Green Bird is doing.

Ten years ago, most participants were Japanese, but now most are

non-Japanese. The number has grown over the years, and now 50 volunteers are not unusual. “It’s satisfying that more people are volunteering, but there is less horizontal connection between the participants,” says Inai. There’s always one more thing to worry about. “I would like to foster the kind of communication that gets people ready to become leaders themselves.”

Inquiries from surrounding countries are directed towards the Paris team, and with input from her, the Green Bird movement has spread to the German city of Stuttgart, to Cameroon and, under the name “Action Casa” to Morocco. “The vigor of the Paris team helps spread the movement to other European and Francophone nations, and it’s fun to watch.” Ten years after the Japan-born movement established itself in Paris, it has spread its wings to the surrounding countries. ✨



Yoshiko Inai

Born in Japan in 1975, she lived in Algeria from ages 0-2, and then in France from ages 8-17. Attending college in Japan, she studied comparative culture. After working for six years in a Japanese company, she went to France in 2004. Having participated in Green Bird events since 2009, she has served as leader of the Paris team since 2013.



The uniforms are matching gloves and vests sent from Tokyo.