

# Pursuing an abundant environment that supports biodiversity — The environmental contributions of PRO TREK watches

Casio PRO TREK outdoor watches have had a legion of loyal users among nature enthusiasts for over 20 years. Leveraging the strengths of the PRO TREK brand, Casio has been working with The Nature Conservation Society of Japan (NACS-J) to develop watches themed around species in need of preservation to promote biodiversity. In 2018, Casio and NACS-J launched a new collaboration model featuring a golden eagle motif, and they followed up in 2019 with a new collaboration model featuring a motif of the *Shijimiaeoides divinus* — an endangered species of butterfly found only in Japan, commonly known as the Large Shijimi Blue. These outdoor watches help to bring attention to ecological treasures that have been disappearing from the mountains of Japan. To learn more, we spoke with Takeshi Nakamura (Timepiece Business Unit, Business Strategy Headquarters, Casio Computer Co., Ltd.) and Daigo Iwahashi (NACS-J), each of whom has played a leading role in this project.



Daigo Iwahashi ,The Nature Conservation Society of Japan(left), Takeshi Nakamura, Timepiece Business Unit, Business Strategy Headquarters, Casio Computer Co., Ltd.

## Collaborating to create new value

What's the story behind the two collaboration models?

**Iwahashi:** The Nature Conservation Society of Japan is an NGO that engages in activities throughout Japan involving the study, protection, and renewal of the environment. Some of our officers at NACS-J knew people in Casio's Timepiece Division, and we got to thinking that we ought to be able to tap into our respective strengths to create something new. That got the ball rolling. On top of that, many of NACS-J's 30,000 members and supporters are big nature enthusiasts, who would of course be very interested in a PRO TREK watch.

**Nakamura:** Ever since the first PRO TREK model came out over 20 years ago in 1995, Casio has been a highly trusted maker of outdoor watches. We thought that collaborating with NACS-J would send customers a clear message about our commitment to nature and the environment. NACS-J, for its part, is one of Japan's leading environmental groups, and it is involved in a very broad range of environmental activities. To come to a meeting of the minds with NACS-J regarding the direction that our collaboration should take, we needed to first understand what NACS-J cared about most, and what it was doing to achieve its objectives.

**Iwahashi:** One of our key themes at NACS-J is the protection of Japan's 3,600 endangered species and their habitats. In the course of discussions, we eventually came up with the idea of incorporating this theme into motifs on PRO TREK watches. Our first collaboration model featured the motif of a golden eagle. NACS-J has long been working to reconstruct a golden eagle habitat in Akaya Forest, located in Minakami-machi, Gunma Prefecture. Golden eagles are an endangered species in Japan. The Akaya Project has yielded some successes. In 2014, for example, golden eagles successfully fledged in Akaya Forest for the first time in seven years.

**Nakamura:** The product's theme and design clearly communicate to customers a simple symbol — the idea of "maintaining a natural environment where the golden eagle can thrive." When we selected the motif for the second collaboration model, we were thinking more of women as likely users; the watch focuses on the endangered Large Shijimi Blue butterfly, a grassland species that survives today only in parts of Kumamoto and Nagano prefectures. By developing these collaboration models, we believed we could invite people to think more deeply about nature and the environment. We believed we could reach not only customers who purchase PRO TREK watches, but also their friends, family and colleagues who might see them wearing the watch.



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## Creating opportunities for users to think about the natural environment

What sort of environmental contributions are you trying to achieve through this collaboration?

**Nakamura:** We are certainly hoping to work via NACS-J to support activities aimed at protecting golden eagles and the Large Shijimi Blue butterflies, but our top priority is to “provide users with opportunities to think about the natural environment.” The fact that you wear a wristwatch wherever you go means it might very well create situations where people will be made aware of nature and the environment. People around you might ask, “Hey, what’s that watch you’re wearing?” And when they do, the conversation naturally turns to golden eagles or endangered butterflies, and from there you might go on to talk about biodiversity. I think that’s the most important thing we’ve “created” with this product — opportunities for users to be reminded of the natural environment.

**Iwahashi:** The question of how to get more people to be more aware of environmental preservation issues is a big topic of discussion at NACS-J. When a company like Casio develops products that contribute to increased sales even as they support environmental preservation, it opens up tremendous possibilities. When someone buys a watch simply because it “looks cool” and then learns later that this watch contributes to the protection of golden eagles, the watch then begins to look even cooler in the user’s eyes. I think this kind of process is important to the birth of social change movements.

**Nakamura:** We really put a lot of discussion into the design process to make sure that users would find the watches attractive. For example, when the LED backlight on the PRO TREK for Large Shijimi Blue is activated, the watch reveals an image of the life cycle of the butterfly. This butterfly spends much of its life in the pupal stage, and flutters but briefly about the grasslands as an adult in the months of May and June. During its larval stage, the Large Shijimi Blue feeds only on a shrub called *Sophora flavescens*. All these little details are faithfully reflected in the backlit display.

**Iwahashi:** We’ve got front-line researchers involved in our effort, so that the motifs we put on our collaboration models can closely approximate “the real thing.” And it’s important that each such “real thing” is the subject of one of our nature preservation projects. The golden eagles and Large Shijimi Blue butterflies are only symbols of something larger. Scientifically speaking, it is quite clear that the environments inhabited by these species have a rich ecology and are worth the effort of preserving. For NACS-J, our mission does not begin and end with just the preservation of golden eagles and Large Shijimi Blue butterflies. Our ability to protect these species is subject to a big precondition — preserving the abundance of the natural environments that are their habitats.



## Contributing via business operations to the environment

What sort of feedback have you gotten on your projects? And what are your future plans?



**Nakamura:** Customer feedback has been very strong, and sales figures show that two models have been extremely popular. Among both employees and business partners, the PRO TREK watches are seen as more than just outdoor watches. People are increasingly aware of the connection between the PRO TREK brand and environmental preservation. The thing we're most happy about is that these watches deliver high value that meets the demands of a wide range of different stakeholders.

**Iwahashi:** The sale of our collaboration models has received front-page coverage in local newspapers in the areas where we are carrying out our projects. The people involved in the projects have been very happy about the attention this has attracted. When a big company like Casio took an interest in our work... when it took the golden eagles and the Large Shijimi Blue butterflies and incorporated them into the design of its watches... I think this has a big impact. The activities of NACS-J are not going to succeed without local community support, so I feel it is very significant that local residents have found the watches so delightful.

**Nakamura:** Moving forward, I think it's very important that we continue working together on this. We don't want to stop with the two collaboration models launched thus far. Rather, we want to work with NACS-J to create new products that will continue to send a message to customers. Beyond the concept of "creating things," awaits the concept of "creating experiences." Casio, pursuing the latter, might also think about working with its own in-house divisions as well as individual employees and their family members to help find people who can take part in volunteer activities and environmental preservation events that also invite the users of Casio watches.

**Iwahashi:** The Timepiece Division, which is one of Casio's main business units, is responsible for implementing this environmental theme. I feel that having a business division play a leading role in this way is precisely how Casio acts on its corporate creed of "Creativity and Contribution." I agree that keeping the momentum going is really important. We want to continue being a good partner. Let's keep putting our heads together to think about how to achieve a better tomorrow.