

SAKAI HIROSHIMA



One of Sakai's mud ponds



Tony Pitham of Koi Water Barn visited the largest koi farm in Japan and the producer of the All Japan Show winners for the past two years



Some of the high tech equipment in the greenhouse

I first met Kentaro Sakai, sales manager at the famous Sakai Fish Farm in Hiroshima at the 2001 Shinkokai All Japan Show where I was judging – Kentaro (Ken) was my translator. We struck up a good rapport and two months later, as the taxi drove through the picturesque countryside, I thought of this year's 2001 stunning Grand Champion, which was bred by Sakai, and wondered what the farm would have in store for us.

Sakai Fish Farm is the largest koi farm in Japan and has won the last two Shinkokai All Japan Shows – the biggest most prestigious show on the

planet. The sales and holding area is set out over 11 large greenhouses in three different locations and there is a massive 30 hectares of ponds.

STATE-OF-THE-ART

On entering one of the massive greenhouses, laden with all the latest koi technology and extremely neat and professional in appearance, Gary Abrams and myself immediately dived into a pond of large 10in plus tosa and selected some superb Kohaku, Sanke and Tancho. The time by now was midday and we all downed nets and Ken took us for lunch at a local Yaki Niku restaurant. Yaki Niku is a

SAKAI INFO

- Bloodlines... Sakai has bred Kohaku with Ochiba Shigure to produce an astonishing body shape.
- Sakai Fish Farm has over 80 mud ponds fed from underground wells 2.5m deep.
- Large filters are used on the greenhouse ponds at a ratio of 25% filter to each pond.
- Japanese filter matting cartridges are used for biological filtration.
- A minimum of water changes are performed as the water quality of the local river is not that good.
- Sakai exports his koi to the USA, UK, Hong Kong, Germany, Taiwan and Singapore.
- Ken has a massive 1.7m Chinese carp, which weighs over 100 kg residing in one of his ponds – truly the largest carp I have ever seen!

traditional Korean dish and involves cooking chicken, prime beef, fish etc on a hot gas stove in the middle of the table. Between mouthfuls and sips of beer, Ken was more than happy to answer my questions.

Sakai Fish Farm use unique breeding methods which produce some of the fastest growing koi in Japan with outstanding body shapes. This is achieved by heating the ponds over winter to 24°C, a constant monitored level of oxygen and a high protein diet.

The food is manufactured by SFF to a strict recipe and, after much probing,



One of the three greenhouse complexes

Ken revealed that it contains 44% protein, carbon and seven other secret ingredients and enzymes. Over 60 tonnes of this food is consumed on Sakai Fish Farm in one year!

GETTING THE FOOD RIGHT

Ken's father has the very difficult job of optimising the food levels given to the koi, especially the tosai. Too much food would cause the water to become bad, causing the koi to suffer, but not enough and optimum growth and body shape are not achieved. They work on a ratio of 2% of food per day per weight of fish i.e. 100kgs of koi = 2kg of food per day and this is supplied via Sakai Fish Farms own design of automatic feeder. These have to be regulated constantly as, when the koi grow, their weight increases and more food is needed per day – this makes

Sakai senior's job very difficult as he judges the weight of the fish by his much trained eye.

Sakai has 60 pairs of breeding stock which are all 85cm plus and they use a mating ratio of one male to one female. For Kohaku, the Sensuke bloodline has been used to produce the Sakai line and Sadazo and Matsunosuke bloodlines have been used to produce Sakai Sanke.▶

“Ken has a massive 1.7m Chinese carp, which weighs over 100 kg residing in one of his ponds”



A large 80cm Kohaku is netted



Tony and Ken viewing tategoi nisai – some valued over £40,000



Netting a pond of toisai for closer inspection



Kentaro Sakai and Tony Pitham

THE BREEDING PROCESS

To understand the mind-boggling process of koi breeding we should look at Sakai’s Kohaku breeding program:

- 12 million fry are spawned in late April
- After 40 days the first culling takes place
- After 60 days the second culling takes place
- After 80 days the third culling is completed
- Koi are then separated into Tategoi and ‘the rest’, which are graded.

At this point they have 130,000 Kohaku out of 12 million fry! Out of these koi only 30 are considered to have Grand Champion potential and prices can

reach up to 7,000,000 yen for these koi at two-years-old – a mind boggling £40,000. By the time these koi reach five there may only be a handful which have reached their expectations.

Because the koi are grown on intensely over the winter, the sex is known very quickly and the males and lower quality females are sold off – last year 70,000 toisai were sold. The nisai are then starved for one month before entering the mud ponds – last year 3,500 nisai were put in the mud ponds.

FUTURE GRAND CHAMPIONS

After lunch we returned to the two-year-old ‘tategoi’ greenhouse and Ken proudly bowled some of his best pieces of Kohaku and Sanke. I have to admit this was a breathtaking experience and was the best pond of nisai I have ever

seen. Superb body shapes, interesting patterns and stunning skin made these koi some of the most expensive two-year-olds in Japan, and future potential Grand Champions. No wonder at an auction of this type of koi, the record for a two-year-old tategoi was smashed at well over £50,000.

I managed to purchase some awesome koi on this visit, which sold out quickly at KWB and can’t wait for my next visit in the autumn – a truly inspiring koi experience! 鯉

PROFILE

Kentaro Sakai

Age: 27

Favourite koi: Kohaku, Sanke.

Ambition: Wants to win the Shinkokai All Japan Show... EVERY year!

Future Plans: This year Sakai is returning to breed Shiro Utsuri which they were once the best.

Views on heating: “Unless you are breeding koi, ponds should always be heated. Sakai Fish farms ponds are held at a constant 24°C. The parent koi are given a winter for two months at between 8-12°C.”