

Marudo Koi Farm

Tim Waddington looks at the huge success of Marudo Koi Farm



About the author:



Tim Waddington has been involved in the koi industry for around 20 years. Having visited Japan over 30 times, he has an excellent relationship with Niigata breeders and a great insight into what they do, and how they do it. Tim hopes this series of articles will help people understand what goes on over in Japan, and how these koi breeders get the finished product into our ponds.

Hisashi Hirasawa of Marudo Koi Farm is now known as one of Niigata's top breeders. He breeds some spectacular koi and his koi win many shows both in Japan and overseas.

Many of the large breeders now aim to become a 'one stop shop' and Marudo is no different. With koi sales worldwide and a huge admiration for him and his koi in the USA and Europe, he is trying to expand into other varieties. Expanding the breeding also means expanding the farm. This expansion has been taking place since 2005 when the main facility was badly damaged in the earthquake.

the man behind Marudo

Hisashi Hirasawa is now 52 years of age. He joined Dainichi Koi Farm when he was just 15 years old and worked there for 18 years. This experience was absolutely fantastic for Hirasawa san. The knowledge he gleaned from Dainichi has resulted in him becoming one of the top koi breeders in the world. It was vital experience for him, and many others who have been schooled at Dainichi.

Hirasawa san is a recognised Shinkokai member and one of the six Niigata

representatives. I'm sure it won't be long until he is the area boss, or perhaps more! You will always see him at the major shows, either judging or running around getting everything organised. The respect this guy gets is almost second to none. And it is very well deserved; his koi are superb and it's a very professional operation. I think everyone who ever visits Japan has this farm at the top of their lists to check out.

a huge operation

With five facilities in different areas around Niigata, Marudo Koi Farm is no small organisation. They have six full time staff and three part time staff to help out during the busy periods. The house in Ohira is the oldest facility and is where Hirasawa san's grandfather first started breeding koi – not in a big way though and it wasn't a real source of income. It did, however, bring out Hisashi's love of koi!

The house that most 'old school' Japan travellers will remember is the one in Nigoro. This is where the family lived prior to the earthquake in 2004. Some fabulous koi were bought from this place, in fact I can remember Nisai there that would make the hairs on the back of your neck stand on end! ▶

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One of the newer houses is on Route 17, which is the main road from Nagaoka to Ojiya. You can't miss it, it's a massive glass house. This is a selling facility and on some days in October and November you can't even get through the door because there are so many people trying to get in!

Very close to this facility is the new family home, built soon after the earthquake and on the flat ground. It's a very nice house which, of course, wouldn't be complete without a huge brand new koi house! This is a very modern facility with 13 tanks ranging from 10 tons to 35 tons. Like most breeders they have a separate house just for their Tosai. The Sanbusho facility has been with the farm for many years now and has 28 ponds ranging from 10 to 30 tons. This is a huge Tosai house and I have had some fantastic fish from here over the years.

The decision to run a koi farm like this is not taken lightly. Hirasawa san has the experience and knowledge to compete with any breeder in Japan and he could be a very

successful small breeder, similar to someone like Shintaro. He didn't have to build new koi houses, produce more koi, have 12 trucks and six to nine staff! He took the job on to become successful for himself and his family. The way it's going the future is looking very bright for the koi farm.

breeding

As I write this Marudo Koi Farm uses around 30 sets of parent koi when breeding. Apart from Sanke, Kohaku and Showa, they also produce Chagoi, Karashigoi, Kujaku, Mukashi Ogon, Kabuto Ogon, Yamabuki Ogon, Shiro Utsuri, Gin Rin Kohaku, Asagi, Purachina, Gin Matsuba and Kin Matsuba!

Koi such as Kabuto are very old and traditional koi which were produced many years ago but were phased out due to lack of demand. Kabuto have always been one of my favourite koi because you just never saw them anywhere. It's always nice to visit Marudo Koi Farm and see them now measuring over 95cm. Maybe next year I will try and bring some into the UK.

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Marudo Harvest. Photo supplied by Devin Swanson

Oozawa Tosai Releasing
5-28-08. Photo supplied by
Devin Swanson



Hyakken Fall Harvest 2007.
Photo supplied by Devin
Swanson



Hisashi has a passion for big koi. He loves to see them grow to one metre with the huge old style body shapes they used to produce. They are a fantastic sight to see.

When it comes to breeding there's nothing small scale about it – Marudo Koi Farm now has around 55 mud ponds just for fry! Most of these ponds are used every year but this year fewer will be used as production will decrease slightly due to the current economic climate. The Go-Sanke will still be bred as usual but other varieties and maybe a few varieties they were planning to introduce will be saved until next year.

In addition to these mud ponds, the farm has 30 ponds which are used for growing all the koi from Tosai. They are huge ponds too.

helping with work experience

Since October 2006 Marudo Koi Farm has employed a young American guy called Devin Swanson. He has worked there for three years now and he is now on a Cultural Studies Visa.

He does return to America during the quiet times but this year is his last in Japan and he will work right through the winter. He lives in the old Marudo house in Niigoro.

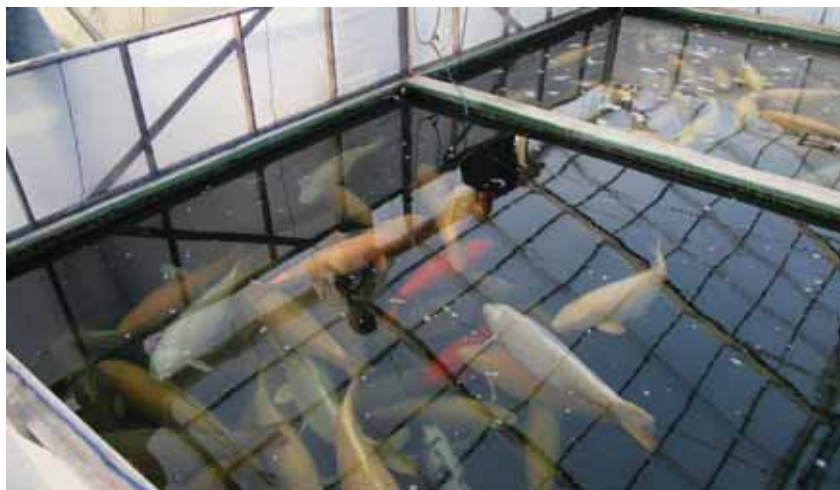
It's been a great experience for Devin and has really set him up well for a long career in koi. As I spoke with him he made this statement: "You could spend your whole life studying koi and still not know it all." Never was there a truer word written!

Devin will head back to the States when his current Visa expires in July. He can now use his three years in Japan to expand his koi business in America. What a fabulous experience for him. There have been many who have come to Niigata to gain experience and learn from the experts, but to get a chance to work somewhere like Marudo Koi Farm is a dream for many!

In a bid to find out a little more about the koi farm I asked Hirasawa san a few questions:

How has the current economic climate affected Marudo Koi Farm?

There has been a slight drop in sales but on ▶



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Kabuto Ogon bred by Marudo.
Photo supplied by Devin Swanson

the whole business has been the same which is really good. We can carry on with our future plans.

What are your future plans?

We want to produce more 'show koi' – koi which can win the All Japan Koi Show. We plan to build a large indoor pond where we can grow and condition show koi for clients and our customers. This is something many are trying to do... including you Tim san!

How many koi are now exported from Marudo Koi Farm?

It's a massive number. I would say that at least 80% of all koi we produce are exported. It really is vital for us.

How has Devin been getting on with the koi farm?

He is a superb student and has learnt a lot. We will all be sad to see him leave because he is our friend. The farm will be sad to see

him leave because he is very good with the koi. He has a great future in koi.

You recently faxed me the KHV certificates for the farm. How often are you checked?

We send samples for KHV testing from every pond we harvest. We wait for the results before we mix them. When koi are taken to koi shows they are quarantined and re-tested for KHV before being mixed again. We also send in random samples every three months for government testing. We take it very seriously and abide by all regulations.

If you are visiting Niigata, make sure you go and see Hirasawa san at Marudo Koi Farm. His English isn't very good but between him and his staff they get by very well. Hirasawa san is famous for his catchphrase, "Oh yes!" He responds with to many questions with this much of the time – "Is this koi a Sansai?" "Oh Yes!" And so on. What a great guy! 鯉



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