

Chapter 8

HOW TO APPRECIATE NISHIKIGOI

Evaluating the Beauty of Nishikigoi

Body conformation, color, and pattern of Nishikigoi

Q. One of the reasons for keeping Nishikigoi is praising, admiring, and enjoying their beauty, but what are the criteria of Nishikigoi appreciation?

A. Before considering the features of each variety, it is important to know the fundamental criteria that apply to any kind of Nishikigoi, which is the body conformation, color, and pattern.

Q. Out of the three, what is the most significant appreciation point?

A. Body conformation, or structure, has a priority over the other two features. Overall evaluation will be dramatically affected by the Nishikigoi's body conformation. The coloration and pattern come after.

Q. What happened to the traditional Nishikigoi evaluation criteria such as quality, dignity, and regality?

A. The concepts of quality, dignity, and regality were used to evaluate or express the beauty of Nishikigoi in Japan for long time. These were classic criteria for Nishikigoi beauty. However, the criteria changed from the first Niigata Nogyosai Nishikigoi Show as part of the 1st National Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Festival, in the 37th year of the Showa era (1962) because it is difficult to judge such values as dignity and regality because they were down to individual perspective. Accordingly, the standard criteria were changed and the prior concepts of dignity and regality replaced with coloration and quality instead.

Q. How did the evaluation criteria change?



▲ A Showa of pure quality, Grand Champion at the 46th Niigata Nogyosai



▲ An elegant Goshiki



▲ Spectacular Kohaku, Grand Champion at the 36th ZNA All Japan Show

A. It changed to what it still is today. Points allocations changed as follows; the allocation for body confirmation was increased from 30 to 50 points out of 100, for pattern the allocation was decreased from 40 to 20 points, the remaining 30 points include coloration and quality.

Q. How are the definitions of the criteria for evaluation of quality and coloration on Nishikigoi?

A. The criteria of quality and coloration are all about the Nishikigoi's complexion. 20 points allot for the evaluation of quality and coloration, 10 points for brightness of color and cleanness of kiwa, 10 points for healthy look of transparent/glossy skin and snow white shiroji and the remaining 10 points for color balance. In the case of Hikarimono, quality of luster, cleanliness of the head, quality of fukurin are included in the evaluation. For kinginrin the level of sparkle and orderly scalation are considered as standards of the judgment. In the past an important part of the evaluation of a Nishikigoi's appearance was coloration because there were no color enhancing foods.

Q. What were the evaluation criteria based on?

A. They are based on what the breeders in Niigata were aiming to create as 'beautiful Nishikigoi'. Masaru Kawakami, Makoto Hiroi, Keiji Seki, and Kenji Otsuka were involved in the process of establishing the evaluation criteria. A perfect Nishikigoi would receive 100 points, full marks for all the aspects that need to be evaluated on Nishikigoi. As a matter of fact, no Nishikigoi has received full points for its beauty yet.

Q. Do these criteria apply to every Nishikigoi?

A. Nishikigoi exhibited in Nishikigoi shows are judged according to the evaluation criteria. Even though they are baby or young, they are still evaluated based on the same criteria.

Q. Have these criteria for evaluation become

standard nowadays?

A. Yes, they are commonly used at Nishikigoi shows.

The beautiful structure that only Nishikigoi have

Q. It seems that the structure of all Nishikigoi looks the same, how can identify specific differences between them?

A. High class Nishikigoi require a balanced spindle-shaped figure. The symmetric and dynamic body conformation of Nishikigoi makes them deserve to be called a king of fresh water fish. Nishikigoi hobbyists appreciate the beautiful swimming Nishikigoi with powerful body structures.

Q. Is the swimming form of Nishikigoi included as the one of the evaluation criteria?

A. Appreciating a moving living organism is different from appreciating a static object, such as bonsai or Japanese traditional antiques, because hobbyists enjoy not only their appearance but also their motions. When you look at high class Nishikigoi schooling in the pond you may be urged to describe them as a moving painting. The first impression of a Nishikigoi is a priority when evaluation them. Experienced judges can easily recognize the character of a Nishikigoi and visualize how it would swim in a pond, even when watching the Nishikigoi in a display pool at a Nishikigoi show.

Q. What is the most important tip when appreciating Nishikigoi's body conformation?

A. Nishikigoi should have a body shape with wide shoulders and an ample figure with a symmetrical curve. It is regarded as dignified and stately beauty and highly evaluated.

Q. Why are photographs of Nishikigoi taken with the head facing down?

A. Nishikigoi look most beautiful while watching them swimming towards the edge of a pond, the viewers eyes trained on the Nishikigoi's back. The ideal structure is defined as

follows. A strong and wide shoulder to hold their head firmly, the middle part of body should have volume, and the tail end should be thick enough to balance with rest of the

body. Consider the bodies of Nishikigoi as a canvas, to be painted with various colors. The wider canvas is the more impressive allowing the painted patterns to look bigger and more



▲ A Kohaku with a perfectly structured body



▲ A graceful Ginrin Showa



▲ The Sanke's back is like a canvas for red and black



▲ Kohaku with balanced dynamic pattern, Grand Champion at 29th AJNPA All Japan Show and 31st ZNA All Japan Show



▲ Sanke. Nishikigoi's pectoral fins are often compared to Japanese style fans.



▲ A Platinum Ogon with balanced body, head, and pectoral fins

dynamic.

Q. Is it unhealthy for Nishikigoi to be overweight?

A. Nishikigoi are often compared to sumo wrestlers with strong muscle embedded underneath the fat. The ideal body conformation for Nishikigoi is like muscular athletes with a little roundness. Most modern Nishikigoi's bodies have expanded at the sides becoming elliptical. The curved outline of the body has become to have a smoother line than before. Whilst the rounded edge of the body is highly evaluated, bodies which lose their symmetric shape, bodies shaped like the letter S or bodies which have gained too much weight on the abdomen are unacceptable.

Q. What are the requirements for the Nishikigoi's fins?

A. When it comes to evaluating Nishikigoi's fins the paired pectoral fins need to be balanced with each other. Either big or small the pec-

toral fins are also required to harmonize with the body.

Q. How should the dorsal fin be?

A. Nishikigoi are required to have fins properly placed and sized. A dorsal fin that opens straight up and is stable is regarded as impressive. The caudal fin must also be fitting with the whole body. The pelvic fins and anal fin should be placed in the correct positions even though they are not visible. Missing fins can make the evaluation of a Nishikigoi bad immediately.

Q. What other parts of the Nishikigoi's body are evaluated?

A. Nishikigoi have a pair of barbels both sides of mouth giving the impression of Japanese samurai. If Nishikigoi lose a barbel from either side then their evaluation decreases.

Q. How are the 50 points of the evaluating criteria for body conformation allocated?



▲ An Asagi with an even reticulated pattern



▲ A Shusui with orderly arranged large scales along the sides of its dorsal fin

A. The allocations are divided as following; the evaluation criteria are body outline, head shape, fins, gender characteristics and scalation. Each scores 10 points. Fins are strictly judged, and the different figures between female and male can be clearly seen. Orderly arranged scales are very important, especially in the case of Doistugoi whose scalation is strictly evaluated.

Coloration on Nishikigoi can change constantly

Q. Is the color more important than the pattern on Nishikigoi?

A. The beauty of the color on Nishikigoi comes before the pattern. The basic colors of Nishikigoi are white, red and black, as expressed on Gosanke. Their red should be bright vermilion (orangey red), their white should be snow white and the ideal black should be a thick and inky black. Originally Japanese called the inky black urushi based on the look of plates and bowls painted with Japanese lacquer. The variations of these colors can be divided into more than 10 recogniz-

able colors.

Q. What are criteria of color evaluation?

A. The specific colors are not important but, to be regarded as Nishikigoi, the colors must be beautiful. There are single-colored Nishikigoi, such as Higoi, Kigoi, Murasakigoi, Midorigoi, Chagoi, Orenjigoi, and Karasugoi and so on, and then others decorated with patches of color such as indigo or wine red. The variation of colors is often described as jewels inside of treasure box.

Q. There are metallic Nishikigoi aren't there?

A. Yes, there are a lot of metallic Nishikigoi beginning with Ogon and Platinum. Colors laid onto the metallic skin create Yamabuki Ogon and Orenji Ogon. When scales partly shine they are regarded as kinginrin variety. There are metallic Nishikigoi that also have kinginrin scales, created by crossing kinginrin and metallic Nishikigoi.

Q. Why are Nishikigoi called 'living jewels'?

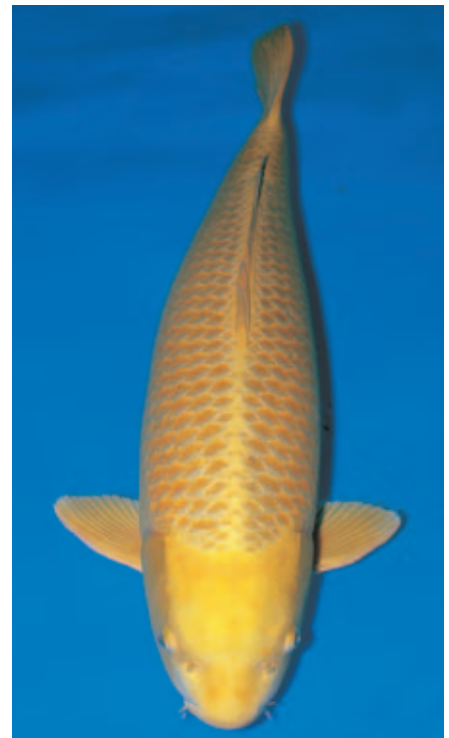
A. Nishikigoi, also well known as Kokugyo, Japanese national fish, contributes to Japa-



▲ A Sanke with balanced coloration



▲ A Higoi demonstrating the tasteful appeal of single colored Nishikigoi



▲ A Yamabuki Ogon, its skin shining brilliantly



▲ Kujaku attract people with their brightness and pattern



▲ A Ginrin Goshiki with scattered sparkling scales on the back



▲ Beni Kikokuryu with metallic background and coloration

nese traditional art. Nishikigoi hobbyists from overseas admired them as living jewels and they become popular exotic oriental hobby among the western world.

Q. Why is it so difficult to express the color of Nishikigoi by painting?

A. The coloration of Nishikigoi cannot be shown on a color chart based on science of color. It is impossible to express the texture and gloss of living organisms by artificial color. Infinite and nameless colors express the various patterns of Nishikigoi.

Q. Why do Nishikigoi's colors seem to change by their environment?

A. The colors are made by nature. Nishikigoi's colors look slightly different in the morning, noon, and night and are also sometimes changed by the weather and seasons. The colors reflecting differently in one's eyes are one of the enjoyments for hobbyists.

The same patterns never appear on Nishikigoi

Q. What are characteristic of Nishikigoi's patterns?

A. No two Nishikigoi ever have the same pattern. There are Nishikigoi resembled each other, but their plates, patches or spots are different. It is impossible to create exactly the same Nishikigoi due to the fact that they are organisms made by nature. Their uniqueness attracts Nishikigoi lovers to develop their Nishikigoi and becomes 'the only one'. When schooling together their different patterns make the pond look lively.

Q. What is the basic evaluation on Nishikigoi's patterns?

A. Due to the uniqueness of Nishikigoi, any kind of patterns can be valued if it suits the Nishikigoi. However, the pattern should be in proportion and balanced, in the other words, symmetric patterns are classically valued. There are standard points in evaluating their patterns, and to learn the standard encourages

you to capture the beauty of the patterns.

Q. How is 20 points specified for pattern, allocated?



▲ A uniquely patterned Kohaku



▲ A Sanke with a unique hi marking on the head, Grand Champion at the 10th AJNPA All Japan Show and the 14th ZNA All Japan Show



▲ A Showa with a good harmony between its three colors



▲ Pictures showing the change of sumi on Showa during the process of growing



▲ Pictures showing the constant change of sumi on Kumonryu



▲ Kumonryu exhibit an annually changing pattern

A. The 20 points are divided into 4 groups, and 5 points are given to each: an outstanding pattern according to each varieties requirements, the symmetry of the pattern, dynamic plates that expand over the back to the lateral lines and pattern without tobi hi. The last two criteria are carefully evaluated.

Q. What kind of Nishikigoi have the characteristic of variable patterns?

A. Nishikigoi used to called ‘variable Koi’ because some of the varieties dramatically change their patterns. Bake Showa are an example of ‘variable Koi’, bake meaning change in Japanese. Nishikigoi hobbyists like Showa that show a change of pattern during their growth.

Q. Why do Showa change?

A. Matsukawabake are the key of the characteristic within Bake Showa and other variable Koi. Showa are a descendant of Matsukawabake that dramatically change position of patterns between summer and winter. In addition the beautiful transforming monochrome pattern of Kumonryu is inherited from Matsukawabake of which they are the Doitsu variant. Hobbyists may experience the Japanese sensory value wabisabi by appreciating the simple transformable pattern of Kumonryu.

Q. Nishikigoi’s patterns can never be calculated and create unpredictable shapes. Is that regarded as one of Nishikigoi’s characteristics?

A. Yes, each beloved Nishikigoi have unique patterns that are never be same. The changeable blend of plates and patches of color can even be defined as designs inside of kaleidoscope.