

Kushimoto Coral Communities High-latitude Coral Communities

Geographical Coordinates: 33°28'N, 135°44'E / Altitude: -20-0m / Area: 574ha (Sabiura 355ha, Shionomisaki 205ha, Tsuyashima 14ha) / Major Type of Wetland: High-latitude coral communities / Designation: Marine Park Zone of National Park / Municipalities Involved: Kushimoto Town, Wakayama Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: November 2005



Catalaphyllia jardinei

Principal Features:

Kushimoto Coral Communities are in the waters off the Cape Shionomisaki in Kii Peninsula, the southernmost tip of Honshu Island. Shionomisaki coastal area features a natural rias coastline with highly clear waters no deeper than 20m. The surface water temperature averages at 21.1°C annually as the warm ocean current "Kuroshio" moves up the Pacific Ocean off the Philippines. The salinity is also high averaging 35.0% throughout the year.

Despite the location in the high-latitude of 33 degrees north, Kushimoto Coral Communities are unique littoral area, rich in tropical marine life as observed mainly in the communities of reef-building corals. The corals contribute to particularly noteworthy feature having more than 120 species to display a spectacular marine landscape.

Coral Communities:

The dominant coral species in this coastal area is *Acropora hyacinthus*, with high degree of propagation for reef topography formation capacity to create a beautiful landscape of table corals. While communities of *Acropora hyacin-*

thus show wide distribution in most of the coastal area, high density observed in the shallow waters off Sabiura is the exclusive area for large-scale pure coral community. The next dominant species is *favia* making this area the northernmost limit in the world for many other species. Especially, the concentration of *Catalaphyllia jardinei* population has only been identified in this area.

Thus, Kushimoto Coral Communities prove to be a valuable habitat found in the coastal area where communities of tropical species are abundant despite such high-latitude location in the temperate climate of Japan.

Marine Parks:

There are four marine parks in the Sabiura area at the north. The corals can be directly admired from the underwater observation tower, or from the glass-bottom of an excursion boat. There are many diving spots as well.

[Catalaphyllia jardinei] Its distribution being mostly in Indian and West Pacific Ocean, this tropical species is a rare and limited species in Japan. The highest concentration of the species can be seen in Tsuyashima area, making



Panoramic view of Sabiura area



Observation tower and excursion boat at the Kushimoto Marine Park



Aerial view

it the largest marine colony in Japan and the northernmost distribution range in the world. Due to the colder climate, reef formation is not possible.

Contact Information:

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