

Kushimoto Coral Communities High-latitude Coral Community

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 community / Designation: Marine Park Area of National Park / Municipalities Involved: Kushimoto Town, Wakayama Prefecture / Ramsar Designation: November 2005 / Ramsar Criteria: 1



Pure communities of Brush Coral *Acropora hyacinthus*



Panoramic view of Kushimoto Coral Communities



Observatory and excursion boat

General Overview:

Kushimoto Coral Communities are found in the waters off the Cape Shionomisaki in the Kii Peninsula facing to the Pacific Ocean. Cape Shionomisaki is the southernmost end of Honshu Island. The coastal area features a natural rias coastline with very clear waters no deeper than 20m. The average annual surface water temperature is 21.1 degrees C because of the warm ocean current "Kuroshio" flowing from the Philippines in the Pacific Ocean. 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 a unique littoral area, rich in tropical marine life which is found mainly in the communities of reef-building corals. Especially, the corals contribute to the unique feature of this wetland with more than 120 species that create a spectacular marine landscape.

Coral Communities:

The most dominant coral species in this coastal area is *Acropora hyacinthus*, which has a high propagation and reef topography formation capacity to shape a beautiful landscape of table corals. While communities of *Acropora hyacinthus* show wide

distribution in most of the coastal area, a high density of a single species coral community of it is found in the shallow waters off Sabiura. The next dominant species is *favia sp.* and this area is the northernmost limit in the world for the distribution of many other species such as *Catalaphyllia jardinei*. Thus, Kushimoto Coral Communities are an important habitat with abundant tropical species communities despite such a high-latitude location in the temperate climate of Japan.

Marine Watching :

The sea around the Kushimoto Coast is designated as a national marine park area and the corals can be easily admired from the underwater observatory or from the glass-bottom boat.

The corals can be easily admired from the underwater observatory, or from the glass-bottom excursion boat. There are many diving spots as well.

[*Catalaphyllia jardinei*] Although it is distributed in the Indian and West Pacific Ocean, this tropical species is a rare and limited species in Japan. The highest concentration of it can be seen in the Tsuyashima area. It is the largest colony of this species in Japan and the northernmost distribution of it in the world.



Full view of Kushimoto Coral Communities

Contact Information:

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