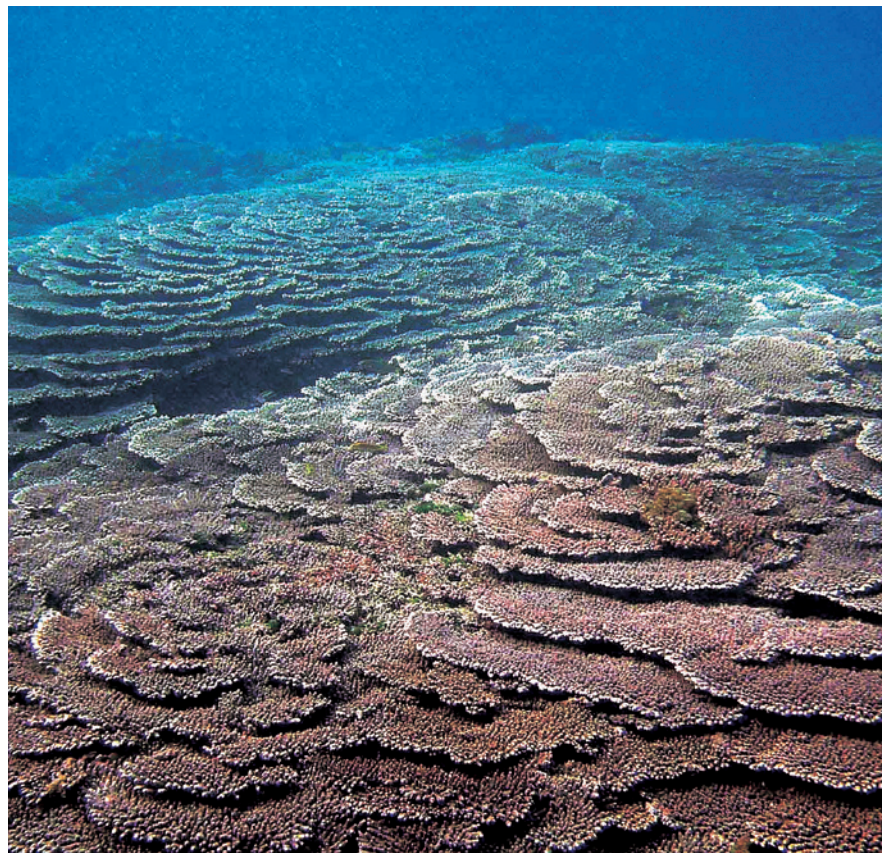


Kushimoto Coral Communities High-latitude Coral Community

Geographical Coordinates: 33°28'N, 135°44'E / Altitude: -20-0m / Area: 574ha (Sabiura 355ha, Shionomisaki 205ha, Tsuyajima 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 located in the waters off the Cape Shionomisaki on the Kii Peninsula facing the Pacific Ocean. Cape Shionomisaki is the southernmost end of Honshu Island. The coastal area features a natural rias coastline with crystal 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. In addition, the salinity is also high, averaging 35.0% throughout the year.

Despite being located at a high latitude

of 33 degrees north, Kushimoto Coral Communities are a unique littoral area, rich with tropical marine life found primarily in reef-building coral communities. Especially, the corals contribute to the uniqueness of this wetland with approximately 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 capacity for propagation and reef topography formation, thereby shaping a beautiful landscape of table corals. Although communities of *Acropora*



Full view of Kushimoto Coral Communities

hyacinthus show wide distribution in most of the coastal area, a high density of pure coral communities is found in the shallow waters off Sabiura. The next dominant species is *Favia* spp., 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 their high-latitude location in Japan's temperate climate.

Marine Observation:

The sea surrounding the Kushimoto Coast is designated as a Marine Park Area of Yoshino-Kumano National Park.

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

[*Catalaphyllia jardinei*] Despite the widespread distribution of *Catalaphyllia jardinei* in the Indian and West Pacific Oceans, this tropical species is a rare and limited in Japan. The highest concentration of it can be seen in the Tsuyajima Island area. It is the largest colony of this species in Japan and the northernmost global distribution.

Contact Information:

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