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GEKKAN NISHIKIGOI

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"Swimming Jewels"
The birth history of Nishikigoi
and their charms

Visiting hobbyist

Nijikawa Japan Co., Ltd.



Breeder Interview : Kanno Koi Farm

The Beauty of the New Era is Oogoke
"Aragoke Koi" play with scales

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The Beauty of the New Era is Oogoke.

“Aragoke Koi” play with scales - Part One

Interview with Toshinobu Ikarashi from Ikarashi koi farm
“Godzilla” was born. Pay attention, aragoke.

In Niigata Prefecture, when asked about Kawarigoi with aragoke, most breeders would answer with Ikarashi, renowned for it at the Ikarashi Koi Farm. In the previous interview in the July 2021 issue, we briefly mentioned the breeding of Aragoke, but could you please provide more details on how you started this initiative?

Ikarashi: Most of the production has been Gosanke in my father’s generation, and the leading markets have been Southeast Asia and China. However, over time, the purchasing preferences in China have gradually shifted, such as a growing demand for two years old. The “Gosanke” is known for using old bloodlines to produce koi that grow large and live longer. So, the perception was that they do not look as stunning at two years old. At around four or five years old, koi tend to grow significantly, and in the case of Gosanke, they start showing the essential sumi around that time. So, when they’re just two years old, it is challenging to sell them because they have yet to reach their full potential. In addition, considering China’s export restrictions, I should create koi that appeal to customers in Europe and other regions. I am also fascinated with Doitsukawarimono, particularly those associated with Ochiba or MetallicOchiba from Kase (Koshiji Koi Farm), so I began creating these varieties.

Did you intend to focus on creating large scales from the beginning?

Ikarashi: I didn’t have much specific focus on it, but since I’ve always been involved in breeding larger koi, I thought if I were going to create something,

The variety adorned with rough scales, known as "aragoke," is particularly divisive among koi enthusiasts. Generally, it tends to be excluded through selection, but in recent years, it has increased popularity as a fresh perspective on beauty, especially in Niigata. This became particularly evident at the 53rd All Japan Combined Nishikigoi Show held this year. The "Kouryu" variety, bred by AO Aokiya Ltd in Ojiya City, received victory high praise. It could be considered the dawn of a new era for Nishikigoi.

I interviewed three breeders creating Aragokegoi as a single variety, not a byproduct.

In the first part, we will introduce the Ikarashi koi farm in Nagaoka City. The second part is AO Aokiya Ltd in Ojiya and Maruzen Kobayashiba in Uonuma City.

it should be a unique koi that would grow larger. So, I decided to get good parents koi.

Did you start creating Kawarigoi koi when you took over the business from your father?

Ikarashi: Yes, that's right. It was about 9 or 10 years ago. At the time, I became the youth leader of the Nagaoka City Nishikigoi Breeding Associations. With increased opportunities to engage with the general public to promote Nishikigoi, I contemplated how to present the koi to bring joy to people. The Gosanke can be surprisingly dull when viewed from the side in a tank because they are typically designed to be seen from above. For instance, even if you place a Maruten Yondan in the tank, only half is visible. And, when I put various types of Kawarigoi into the pond, aragoke on the lateral line really stood out. Additionally, when illuminated with LED lighting, the ambience changed, which made me realize the potential and fascination of aragoke. That's when I started to delve into it seriously.

I have an impression many Aragokegoi bred by Ikarashi is with ginrin.

Ikarashi: As expected, having Ginrin makes it flashier, and with regular silver scales, they tend to become solid silver towards the lower part of the lateral line, making them less noticeable. But with aragoke, I thought it would shine even more. I used a second-generation male from DoitsuMetallicOchiba crossed with a female from GinrinOchiba (with scales). Although the occurrence rate was low, I produced aragoke with silver scales. I raised them in mud ponds and put them up for sale. People from Europe and the United States showed interest, especially in the Ginrin along the back fin, which they called "Diamond back." They happily took them home.

How did the iconic Aragokegoi "Godzilla," representing Ikarashi Koi Farm, known for its distinctive ginrin, come into being?

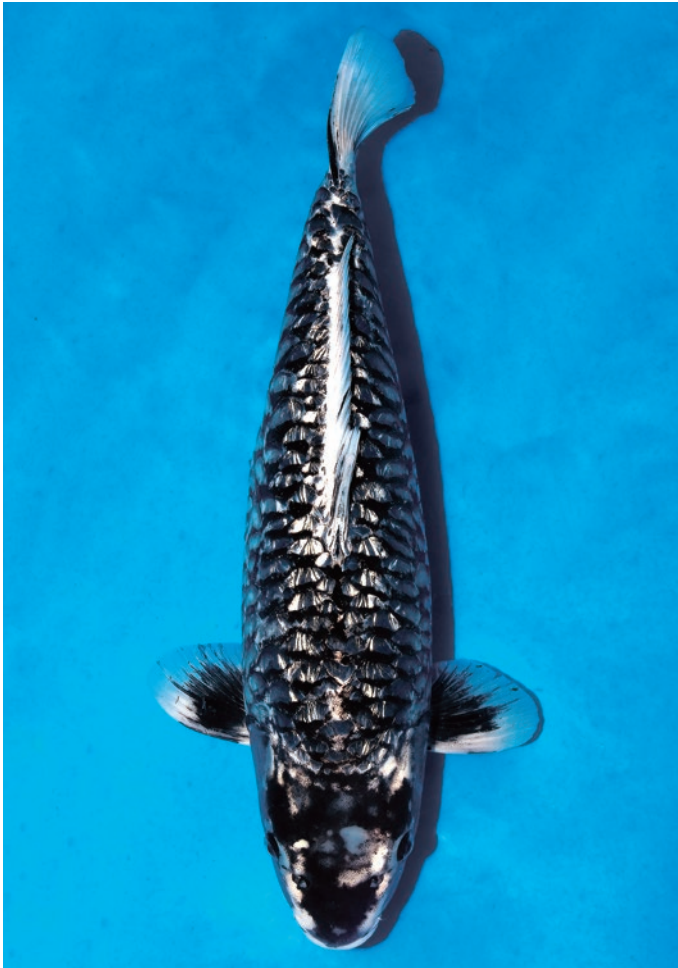


Ikarashi Koi Farm Toshinobu Ikarashi

Ikarashi: I didn't intentionally create this; it formed accidentally or came about as a byproduct. As a process of breeding ginninggoi with scales, there are various lineages, some exhibiting ginrin on the surface while others manifest it internally. When attempting to represent ginrin in aragoke, it was found that surface silver appeared blurry. Thus, when considering which ginrin would be the best, it was concluded that ginrin with all elements would be ideal. I desired to create scales that shine on both the front and back, along the pattern of growth rings, and even incorporate the silver of diamonds. Although it may appear cluttered, the goal was to create something dazzling, long-lasting, and glittering.

Compared to typical scales, does aragoke have difficulty in displaying silver?

Ikarashi: Silver typically adheres well to the back but struggles to stick to the scales on the shoulder. I wanted to put ginrin there, so I searched for parent Koi that could carry silver well and found several. I focused primarily on the body and silver, introducing ginrin from Karashi and Ochiba bloodline.



"Gozilla" represents the Ikarashi Koi Farm.



So, does Godzilla's parent belong to the Karashi and Ochiba lineage, then?

Ikarashi: The Karashi bloodline ginrin can only be produced for one year, and in the second year, only the Ochiba bloodline can be. Therefore, the first generation Godzilla crossed the Ochiba bloodline ginrin with DoitsuKarashi from my stock.

So, by crossing the Ochiba and Karashi lineages, you can create jet-black koi, right?

Ikarashi: While Karashigoi is generally perceived as yellow, the term 'yellow' is slightly different. It has a base colour resembling a greyish, like Soragoi, which overlaps to create a deep mustard colour. So, when using mustard koi to create something, a lot of black koi are produced.

I see.

Ikarashi: I combine various elements to create koi

and breed parents, and through this process, the characteristics of the varieties become apparent. Over time, I have understood what happens when different varieties are crossed.

What was the customer response when "Godzilla" was introduced to the market?

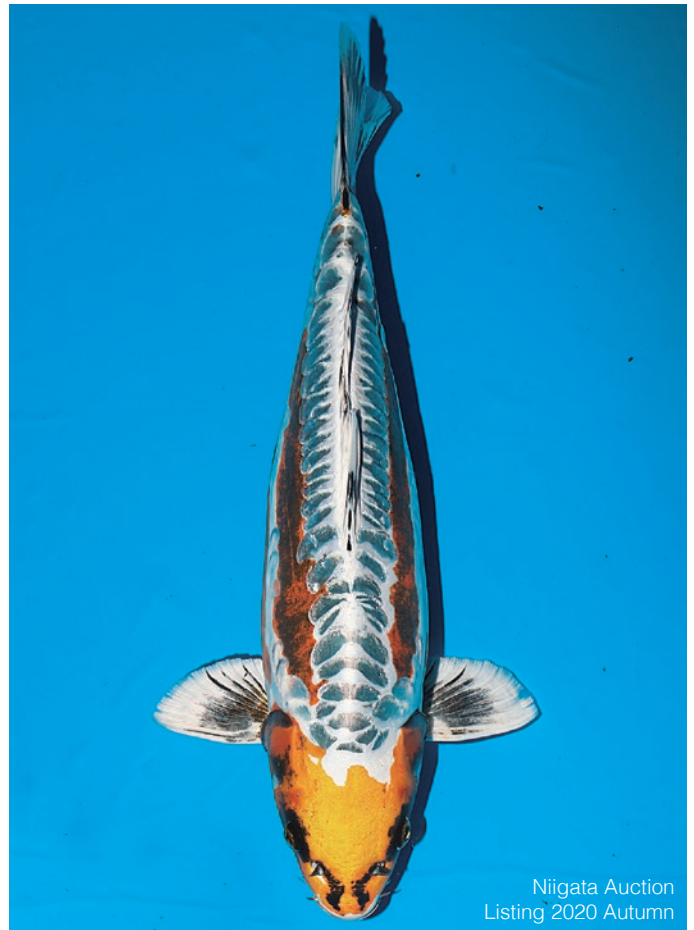
Ikarashi: The size, arrangement, and distribution of the scales of aragoke are typically what people understand when we say "Godzilla". It was the first shown in the koi auction in Niigata in the autumn of 2019(the photo is 30p, right). This koi had a well-balanced aragoke pattern and a strong impact, so customer feedback was incredibly positive.

When silver was added, even Mujimono looked flashy, didn't they? Is it indispensable to put ginrin to make Aragokegoi?

Ikarashi: You're right. Without ginrin, it's definitely harder to sell them.



A diverse array of Aragoke koi is swimming among Gosanke.



The yellow-based Aragoko koi is bred by Ikarashi Koi Farm and is known as 'Kouryu'.

Moreover, when silver is added to the DoitsuYama-buki, it shines by itself, so when light hits it, ginrin stands out. However, the silver is entirely imperceptible even if there is ginrin, without other colours by itself. On the contrary, it doesn't look beautiful because the boundary with the scales is hard to see. The reason why aragoko is considered not beautiful is scales disrupt the pattern, and it's because the scales themselves lack individual charm or flashiness. Aoki's Kouryu stands out because it has black scales on a yellow background. Even if a similar aragoko colour were incorporated into a yellow background, it probably wouldn't stand out as much.

**Interview with Toshinobu Ikarashi from Ikarashi koi farm
Kawarigoi brings a multifaceted perspective.**

How do you feel about the evaluation Kouryu nicknamed King Gidorah (Photo on 9 pages) by AO Aokiya Co., Ltd. won at the 53rd All Japan Combined Nishikigoi Show this year?

Ikarashi: Perhaps the perspective has shifted, or

all possible pattern-focused Nishikigoi already have been created. For instance, koi, which has a heart within the pattern and may seem like unique koi, fetches high prices at auctions and is highly valued, but I am not sure.

Are perspectives on Kawarigoi also changing as the various Kawarigoi are being created?

Ikarashi: Indeed, that koi has a yellow body, and aragoko appears blackish, creating a clear contrast. Even the scales are evenly aligned to some extent, beautifully on both sides. I think an outcome like this is really positive, but if we standardize it like a manual in the future, it might not be exciting. If breeders or dealers have some fixed concepts, it limits the possibilities for new ideas. Instead of viewing things as 'this is good, and everything else is bad, I think it's better to appreciate the beauty in various approaches.

By the way, do you discuss aragoko with Aoki?



The Kouryu bred by AO Aokiya Co., Ltd.



Ikarashi: If you look at Aoki's pond, you'll see many shiny koi, like BeniKikokuryu and Bniginga. It is sparkling and glamorous. That's why I go to his house. And it is an excellent opportunity to talk about koi with him, like playing sales, which is fascinating. When I introduced Godzilla, Aoki said it was interesting. I've been making Kawarigoji with Aoki, even on different farms, and there are some similarities. I am thinking of increasing the lineup of yellow-based ones myself.

When it comes to yellow-based ones, I immediately think of Ikarashi's original variety, Yellow-Kinshowa.

Ikarashi: I could add sumi with Yellow Kinshouwa; in contrast, it ended up blurring the yellow patterns instead. I wanted to stand out kiwa, so I made a slightly deeper yellow-coloured one. But people told me that it didn't look good in that colour. I realized it really had to be a colour, like a lemon. In addition, I want to create kiwa on it, which seems impossible. I still have been trying to create it every year,

though. Moreover, the selling timing is tricky. When I bring Yellow Kinshowa up in autumn, sumi is strong, making the colour appear somewhat greenish and not beautiful. Then, around February, sumi settles, and yellow stands out, finally becoming Yellow Kinshouwa. Moreover, the selling timing is tricky. When Yellow Kinshowa come up from a mud pond in autumn, sumi is strong, making the colour appear somewhat greenish and not beautiful. Then, around February, sumi settles, and yellow stands out, finally becoming Yellow Kinshouwa. When I raised it to be a parent next time, the yellow stretched and blurred, and kiwa disappeared.

It's pretty delicate, isn't it?

Ikarashi: My pond tends to get dark because I have a lot of darker-toned varieties like Ochiba, Mukashioigon and Koganeochiba. Having varieties like Yamabuki and Hariwake, including gold tones, really brightens the overall image. That's why I'd like to aim for golden tones in each variety.



The Niigata Prefectural Inland Water Fisheries Experimental Station is working on varieties like Kijiro, KiSanshoku, and KiShowa, which are getting popular in their yellow lineage.

Ikarashi: Marusei (Marusei Koi Farm) is making Mizuhoogon. Marusei mentioned that it would be good if you could create a yellow version of Mizuhoogon. At first, I aimed for something like DoitsukiMatsubaogon, but there was a difference between when the black Aragoke appeared and when it didn't. To get black aragoke, I need to cross different varieties. That's why I cross DoitsuYamabuki with KiMatsubaogon or KujiyakuMatsuba. However, the crossing includes red pigment, so the body tends to get red spots and dull colour. As a result, productivity decreases. I thought a solution would be to add ginrin. For example, if black spots appear, it can ruin the Mujimono variety. So, I thought it might be better to incorporate black spots that appear intentional as part of the pattern. That's why I created a variety called Kouryu.



Aoki, who won the All Japan this time, also had a koi named Kouryu, so did you both name it together?

Ikarashi: No, it's not like that. When it had a yellow body and black aragoke emerged, I named it Kouryu based on its appearance. By chance, Aoki also named it the same!

I've heard that the colour yellow isn't stable, but does it hinder improvements?

Ikarashi: Yellow is incredibly challenging because it is difficult to bring out kiwa. It can be produced yellowish koi at tosaï and two years old using yellow coloured parent. But as they grow, they tend to turn more orange or reddish, and kiwa disappears. Kawarigoi is to enjoy and appreciate the change. When selling a koi as yellow patterns, I need to establish and fix those yellow patterns as a variety firmly.

Interview with Toshinobu Ikarashi from Ikarashi koi farm
Creating various types with solid and patterned designs.

When combining parents, do you find that if both have aragoke, the scales stand out too much?

Ikarashi: If I want to create Aragokegoi purely, it's okay to do so, and occasionally, I also make such combinations. However, in the case of ginrin, if both have aragoke, it becomes difficult to fix the silver scales at the shoulder area, so the silver tends to appear less. So, when I wanted to emphasize grin, I crossed a beautiful koi with scales with clear silver, with aragoke, or sometimes a Doitsugoi.

Are there any changes in the arrangement of Aragoke due to growth?

Ikarashi: It hardly changes. The placement is almost fixed. When you closely observe during the primary selection, you can generally see the scales well, so if a koi has missing scales along the lateral line, they will still be missing as it grows. Scales do not emerge up later. So, at that time, I could understand the type of scales, whether large scales appeared, whether they lined up well from the shoulder area, or whether smaller scales were scattered over.

Even though we refer to them as aragoke, I believe there are variations depending on the combination of parent koi, correct?

Ikarashi: Yes, significantly. Ideally, I want to bring out aragoke at the shoulder area prominently and firmly emphasize the silver, but depending on the combination, it may only come out sometimes. Even if aragoke do appear, they may be what we commonly call poorly arranged aragoke, or the large scales may be clustered together. So, achieving beautiful and large scales is difficult when creating them. No matter how much crossbreeding I do, the desired traits only emerge when the combinations between varieties match. That's why I've been ex-



perimenting with various combinations for about three years. As I've improved my understanding of scales, they've emerged according to my expectations by selecting varieties accordingly and crossbreeding. So, to some extent, it's possible to create them intentionally.

In the future, will you also expand to include types other than the Godzilla or Ochiba lineage?

Ikarashi: It's essential to have a variety of colour combinations. Just because Godzilla is popular doesn't mean I should focus only on it. So, I'm working on producing various colours while incorporating different bloodlines. Especially for tosai mixes, it's crucial to achieve a balanced colour scheme to create an overall appealing impression and attract buyers.

Mujimono highlights aragoke well, but how do they pair with patterns?

Ikarashi: large scales can be obstructive when it



An Aragokekoi with a diverse range of colouration and scale patterns.

comes to patterns like Hariwake or DoitsuKujyaku on plain ones. So, when I think about balancing patterns and scales, I want to get Syusui, which has onigoke with silver or Matsuba, which has black scales that concentrate on the shoulder. These scales do not interfere with the pattern, so making such distinctions is essential.

Currently, there are roughly two types of bloodlines in terms of silver scales. One type revolves around the Godzilla bloodline, where silver is prominently displayed throughout the body. The other type consists of lineages where silver is predominantly found only on the back.

Doitsugoi can be divided into “Kawagoi” with few scales and “Kagamigoi” with large scales. Do you use both types in crossbreeding?

Ikarashi: It’s just my opinion, but while Kawagoi may seem better according to the standards of the Koi Show, when I look at the body, they tend to be inferior or absolutely sag in the belly and don’t grow big.

It is often noted that Doitsugoi are susceptible to changes in body shape.

Ikarashi: For example, even if you cross one metre female Kawagoi with an 80cm male Kawagoi, the offspring won’t necessarily be larger than the parents. So, when considering what enlarged them, I remember Konishi’s (Konishi Koi Farm) Doitsu crossbreeds, which always have scales along the lateral line or on the shoulders. I think that’s probably the factor that contributes to their growth. With scales present, they support the bones and body, similar to armour, so they grow larger.

I see, that’s interesting!

Ikarashi: Perhaps Kawagoi that have grown large are offspring of a koi with scales and Doitsugoi, which, even though they don’t have scales, due to remnants of their scaled ancestors, grow larger. When the genes for Kawagoi become firmly estab-

lished, they don’t grow large. Doitsugoi was initially introduced to the Nishikigoi because they were known to have good appetites and grow large. However, nowadays, it’s completely the opposite. It is said that Doitsugoi don’t grow large. Of course, Kawagoi is generally considered more beautiful, so everyone tends to inbreed. I think it’s more important to focus on scales rather than worrying about inbreeding issues.

I think the fixation of varieties and inbreeding are inseparable relationships.

Ikarashi: Yes, that’s correct. If I feel satisfied with adding variations and bloodlines and believe it’s good enough as a variety, then I proceed with the fixation process. But I’m currently exploring which colourations emerge most efficiently and which ones are best as products. Once I have a clearer picture of the fixation in that aspect, I’ll probably proceed with the fixation through crossbreeding among the already developed ones. On the other hand, the ginrin bloodline is an indispensable aspect, but it leads to slight inbreeding. So, I want to figure out how to mix and dilute it gradually while blending it.

I look forward to further improving aragoke and expanding its variations, expecting its excellent performance in the Koi Show.

Ikarashi: It would be interesting to have many customers who appreciate the beauty of scales and Fukurin. As a breeder, it’s crucial for me to figure out how to stabilize unique variations of koi. So, when someone says they want a particular koi that isn’t available, I’d like to be able to offer them alternatives like, “Well, I don’t have that one, but I do have this.” I want to have a variety of koi to accommodate a range of customers and preferences.