

Kingfisher Newspaper

The origin of the newspaper's name

The kingfisher, with its beautiful blue and dark-green plumage, is a member of the Alcedinidae family of birds. We befittingly named our paper after the aquarium with the same name.

Small aquarium making great efforts

Showcasing the beauty of Fukushima rivers

On 31 July 2018, the members of Group 3 visited Aquamarine Inawashiro Kingfishers Aquarium to report on its activities. Here, we would like to introduce this small aquarium located in a valley that uses great ingenuity to attract and sustain the interest of visitors. The aquarium recreates the natural environment of Fukushima Prefecture, which is blessed with rich sea and mountain. The aquarium has been gaining popularity in recent years, under the care of its passionate caretakers and their love for living things. The aquarium, which has the characteristics of a freshwater aquarium, consists of Building No. 1, which houses Japanese river otters and is used for holding various events, and Building No. 2, which features birds and endangered species.

Kingfishers Aquarium was opened in 2015 at the foot of Mount Bandai. Before that, these same buildings housed the Inawashiro Fresh Water Aquarium.

The aquarium greatly gained in popularity after its renewal and is currently visited by approximately 68,000 visitors annually. There are 120 species of animals, totalling to about 2,500 animals. The aquarium has 11 employees, among which, a group of three caretakers, team leader Mr. Kei Hirasawa (41), Mr. Keita Tokura (27) and Mr. Shun Nagayama (26), are in charge of rearing the animals. With their extensive knowledge of nature to draw from, they are making every effort to make the aquarium an attractive place for visitors.

Although the aquarium cannot be considered large by any standard, it uses its characteristics as a freshwater aquarium to great advantage and has many unique living creatures. It also organizes interesting events.

On the day of our visit, 'The Battle: Lethocerus vs Diving Beetle (Challenge to Master

Mantis)' featuring wooden props, figures and cosplay costumes made by the staff, was held at the aquarium. It was a fun experience as visitors could learn about Lethocerus and the diving beetle, whose habitat has been drastically reduced.

One of the behind-the-scenes activities of the aquarium is the regular conduct of survey of the biological environment of Fukushima Prefecture. The aquarium also constantly monitors the water environment of the prefecture and has a permit to collect, study and breed endangered and invasive species in the prefecture. It is committed to doing its part in the preservation of the delicate balance of the water environment in Fukushima Prefecture.

The aquarium is open from 9:30 am to 5:00 pm. Admission fees are 700 yen for high school students and older, 300 yen for elementary and junior high school students and free for preschool children.

(Takumu Watanabe, Kotaro Watanabe, Yushin Nakamura, Taichi Toyohara)

Preparing the food is really hard work

Our members had the opportunity to experience preparing food for the otters. Currently, the aquarium houses two Eurasian otters, a nine-year-old mother otter, Chirol, and her two-year-old daughter, Yuki.

The menu rotates between a mixture of horse meat and rainbow trout on the first day, chicken meat and rainbow trout on the second day and just rainbow trout on the third day. Approximately 7 kilos of food are prepared every day.

During our hands-on experience preparing the food, we cleaned about four to five rainbow trouts. Because of our poor knife skills, we had difficulty cleaning and gutting the fish properly. Working with an expert's touch, Mr. Nagayama prepares food twice a day. It was a humbling experience for us as we realized the hard work involved.



Preparing food for the otters



Cosplay depicting the battle between Lethocerus and the diving beetle

Using the leftovers of the food prepared for the otters, he also prepares food for the water shrew, which consists mainly of rainbow trout cut into small pieces.

The Lethocerus is fed with small fish. Care is taken not to let food remains and other impurities pollute the water, as it may result in the death of the sea animals. Just like in the natural environment, the deterioration of water quality is of great concern.

(Takumu Watanabe, Kotaro Watanabe, Taichi Toyohara)

The Three Passionate Musketeers (caretakers)

Kei Hirasawa (41)

Mr. Hirasawa is the oldest among the three caretakers. He is mainly in charge of aquatic animals. Mr. Hirasawa is specially knowledgeable about the diving beetle, to the point where he is sometimes called Doctor Diving Beetle. This year, he organized a rare aquatic insects exhibition. He experienced the tsunami of the Great East Japan Earthquake when he was working at Aquamarine Fukushima in Iwaki City. (Yushin Nakamura)



Keita Tokura (27)

Mr. Tokura is mainly in charge of birds and fishes. He can give a detailed explanation of the American bullfrog and other invasive species that are having a great impact on the habitat of animals living by the waterside. He is excited about his new responsibilities involving the breeding of kingfishers. Among the aquatic animals, he highly recommends the sculpin. (Mona Obayashi)



Shun Nagayama (26)

Mr. Nagayama is in charge of the otter and the water shrew (Chimarrogale platycephalus). He prepares the food for these mammals, which usually live by the riverside. Mindful of the health of the animals, he adds vitamins and antifoamants to their food. While working at Iwaki City's Aquamarine Fukushima, he oversaw marine animals. (Hinata Sano)



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