

Koi shows

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KOI SHOWS



Above: The Dutch Koi Society held their first show in 1993 and it was judged and benched by the BKKS Judging Standards Committee

Below: History was made in 2006 when two UK hobbyists, Martin Plows and Mark Crampton, won the AJNPA Koi show



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HISTORY

Japan

Koi shows originated in the 1900s in Niigata, Japan, when rice farmers met at the harvest shows (Te-agari) and displayed their nishikigoi among all the other produce of the region. In 1912 they held the first Koi-only show which laid the foundation for the development of the now famous Niigata-Nogyosai Show, which was first held under that title in 1956.

Some six years later, in 1962, Japanese hobbyists got in on the act and held the first 'hobbyist-only' show in Oita. By 1968 these hobbyists had united under the banner of the Zen Nippon Airinkai (ZNA) and held the first ever All Japan Show.

The first combined breeders and dealers show (AJNPA) took place in Tokyo a year later. I wonder if the pioneers who put on that first show ever envisaged its Grand Champion prize being won by a pair of British enthusiasts?

America

The first overseas Koi show took place in Hawaii in 1964, followed by the first on the

US mainland, held by the Southern Californian ZNA Chapter, in 1974. This show is still in existence and therefore has the honour of being the oldest Koi show outside Japan.

Bernie Woollands

answers these questions and more in his journey through Koi show history...

Bernie Woollands



Bernie Woollands has kept Koi since 1969 and joined the BKKS in 1985. He became a member of the South East Section in 1988 and has worked on various committees. He's been a probationary judge since January 2006.

A large expat Japanese community in Brazil has also been holding Koi shows since the mid 1980s – Koi are often passed on from one businessman to another as they complete contracts.

UK

The first UK Koi show was held by the Northern Section of the British Koi-Keeper's Society (BKKS) in the back garden of Peter Waddington's home in 1975, one year earlier than the first ever BKKS British National in 1976. Shortly afterwards BKKS Sections started holding local shows throughout the country. However, the BKKS didn't have it all their own way. The independent Yorkshire Koi Society followed suit in 1977 and, like their counterparts in Japan, British dealers ran a series of shows under the banner of the British Association of Nishikigoi Dealers (BAND) from 1987 to 1989. The only dealer-run show held today



The largest Koi show outside Japan is held by the Dutch Koi Society

THE FIRST UK KOI SHOW



Peter Waddington has many notable firsts in the UK Koi hobby; so many in fact that people often overlook his first significant contribution to the hobby – landlord of the first ever UK Koi show.

is the International Show at Billing Aquadrome, although the Professional Koi Dealers Association (PKDA) managed to stage another a few years ago.

At one point in the early 90s there were 40 Koi shows in one year, the majority of which were run under the auspices of the BKKS. In addition to the YKS, the North and South Chapters of the ZNA in the UK have both been running shows since 1995 and continue to do so today. However, for the last few years there hasn't been an instance where both Chapters have held a show in the same year, although I am reliably informed that 2007 will be different.

Europe

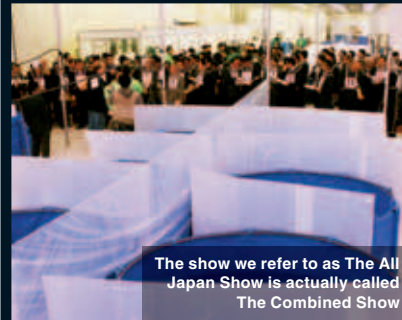
The first European Koi show was hosted by the Dutch Koi Society (NVN) in 1993 and was benched and judged by members of the BKKS Judging Standards Committee (JSC). This show continues to thrive and has the reputation of being the largest nishikigoi show outside Japan; it is now rightly referred to as the European National. The now defunct De Vlaamse Koi Society (from Belgium) held its first show in 1995, along with the German Koi Society (KLAN) who continue to hold their show annually. In 2004 a new club called Koi2000, covering Belgium and the Netherlands, arrived on the European scene and started holding shows right away.

Elsewhere

The South African show scene began in 1990; the first South African Koi Keepers Society (SAKKS) National show was held in Johannesburg with just 11 exhibitors but a massive 290 Koi. The Western Cape Chapter was the first to stage their own

THE ALL JAPAN SHOW

There is a lot of confusion regarding the All Japan Show. In Japan that title actually refers to the National ZNA Show, whereas here in the UK we use it to refer to the AJNPA (Shinkokai) Show, which they call The Combined Show. The confusion comes from the term Zen Nippon (or Zen Nihon) which literally means All Japan. This phrase is used in the title of several Koi associations in Japan, both hobbyist and commercial.



The show we refer to as The All Japan Show is actually called The Combined Show

show in 1994 and by 1997 all four of the Chapters that now comprise the South African show circuit were in full swing.

Despite a ban on Koi in most states, Australia has a thriving scene – three separate Koi Societies (KSA, AKA in New South Wales and KSWA in Western Australia) have been holding shows since their inception and continue to do so today.

EVOLUTION

In the beginning...

When that very first show was put on in the UK there were no guidelines to work from and no expertise to impart – it was purely a case of necessity being the mother of invention. The early show vats were constructed from sheets of polythene supported by wire garden fencing. I doubt that there was more than 1ft of water in them, however it has to be said that the Koi on show were by no means large. Judging was in its infancy too, with the early pioneers playing it strictly by ear.

Looking back with today's perspective that early show might seem laughable, but lessons were learnt from that very first experience and, within a few years, the British Koi scene took on an appearance that isn't too far removed from today.



The blue show vats all Koi clubs use today were first introduced to the UK in 1985

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Koi shows



Above: BKKS judges are in great demand and their rigorous judging programme is envied the world over

Below: Biosecurity measures, such as foot dips and hand sprays, are now commonplace at UK Koi shows and help protect the Koi and the people handling them in the centre ring



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In 1985 Infiltration bought some blue 'Airinkai' vats in Japan and introduced them to the show scene; they used to loan these vats out to Sections for their shows. But before long British manufacturers got in on the act and now many Koi keepers have their own in case of emergency. Incidentally, many of those original Airinkai vats are still in use at Koi shows today.

Judging standards

Judging also came under scrutiny with the BKKS adopting the rules of the Federation of British Aquatics Societies (FBAS) for a while. But those rules were more appropriate for judging fish in aquariums than in show vats so the BKKS set out to introduce and develop their own. However, the legacy of those FBAS rules still lingers with the term 'benching'.

Two very prominent participants of that first show, Val Frost and Peter Waddington, were among those that produced the very first set of BKKS Show Rules and Guidelines that still govern the majority of the UK's shows today. They also played a significant part in setting up the JSC following the example of the hobbyists of Japan (ZNA) who were the first to set down show standards and rules. In the intervening years the BKKS have modified their rules in accordance with the trends of this country. With some very minor exceptions, the rules of the ZNA and BKKS remain primarily the same.

Health precautions

Along with judging standards and show rules the BKKS began to stipulate measures associated with the welfare of Koi at shows. Due to an outbreak of SVC in 1987, the English style of showing Koi

became the norm. Often criticised in some quarters as being ineffective, the biosecurity procedures associated with it have stood the test of time, not to mention KHV, to the extent that they have now been adopted by both the hobbyist and dealer societies in Japan. The procedures defined in those days are still the mainstay of those in use today – the main difference is the products that are used for disinfecting, and some attention is now being focused on the needs of Koi handlers with the use of antibacterial scrubs and disposable paper towels.

Technology

Advances were not only the prerogative of the visible aspects of the show. Behind the scenes the original paper-heavy, labour-intensive benching administration processes were rationalised, improved and then eventually automated. My own Section developed the first piece of software in 1991 that went on to be used in the UK, USA and Australia. The BKKS's late, great Andrew McGill developed the second-generation program that is used today and which has also travelled the globe.

Reputation

Time, and the associated efforts, have brought dividends. The BKKS is respected among the rest of the world's Koi community and every year the National, and even some of its Section shows, attract an increasing number of visitors from overseas. Our judges are in demand too and its training programme is envied by many whose show infrastructure cannot support such an intensive programme. We may have been overtaken abroad, where shows attract more entrants, but we are still keeping ahead where quality is concerned. I don't think it is a coincidence that the first Westerners to win Grand Champion at the AJNPA Show were a pair of Brits whose first successes were at UK shows.



Hebetoo was bought with the proviso that she was shown at the UK National



THE YORKSHIRE KOI SOCIETY



The Yorkshire Koi Society, although fiercely proud of their independent status, have never baulked at combining with the BKKS when the hobby is under threat. For example, they have provided details of their experiences and findings to the BKKS to assist in their negotiations with The Pet Licensing Act, and they have also donated money to the Ojiya museum appeal following the earthquake in October 2004.

IMPACT

Japan

If you have ever visited a Koi breeder close to the time of a show you will be left in no doubt that Koi shows are very important to them. It's a time to put their skills to the test and see how they compare with those of their counterparts. Obviously, the Grand Champion is the most prestigious award, but they are equally concerned over just about every award in the show. In the lower echelons breeders are seeing how their fish of the future will fare, while also seeing what other breeders are developing.

Success at Koi shows drives the breeders to improve the quality of their Koi and that applies to foreign shows too. It is well documented that Cliff Neale, Grand Champion winner of the 2003 and 2005 Nationals, was only allowed to buy Hebetoo on the proviso that she was shown at the National, and I have witnessed several other Koi being sold in Japan under the same terms and conditions. Showing is all (Zen) to the Japanese whether hobbyist, dealer or breeder.

UK

In the UK, where serious breeding is only just coming to fruition, Koi shows are more about promoting the hobby. Most Section shows hope to increase membership via their show and the members that man the stands will tell you that they spend most of their time answering queries about Koi keeping from the general public. I was once told that the ratio was 10 queries for every member gained, which may not be a productive ratio but any opportunity to educate the public and promote good Koi

Above: The Japanese breeders see Koi shows as an opportunity to compare their Koi with others

Below: Koi clubs will take every opportunity to promote their club to outsiders and will man stands to try and encourage new members to join



A show is a great place to see healthy, top-quality Koi owned by Koi keepers like you

JARGON BUSTER

AJNPA: ALL JAPAN NISHIKIGOI PROMOTION ASSOCIATION
AKA: AUSTRALIAN KOI ASSOCIATION
BAND: BRITISH ASSOCIATION OF NISHIKIGOI DEALERS
BKKS: BRITISH KOI KEEPERS SOCIETY
JSC: JUDGES STANDARDS COMMITTEE
KHV: KOI HERPES VIRUS
KSA: KOI SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA
KSWA: KOI SOCIETY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
NVN: NISHIKIGOI VERENIGING NEDERLAND (DUTCH KOI SOCIETY)
PKDA: PROFESSIONAL KOI DEALERS ASSOCIATION
SAKKS: SOUTH AFRICAN KOI KEEPERS SOCIETY
SHINKOKAI: JAPANESE WORD FOR AJNPA
SVC: SPRING VIRAEMIA OF CARP
YKS: YORKSHIRE KOI SOCIETY
ZNA: ZEN NIPPON AIRINKAI

keeping practices can only be good for the Koi keeping hobby.

A show itself can be equally educational in terms of Koi appreciation and good husbandry. Only Koi in good health are permitted in the show vats and anybody interested in showing Koi soon learns that 'benching begins at home' and that it is in their best interest to provide ideal conditions for their Koi. Even those not interested in showing get to see other people's Koi and get the chance to make comparisons and observe how they do in competition. Just like Japan, the UK shows have driven the hobby to the level it is. High-quality Koi at shows raise the expectations of the hobbyist, which in turn drives dealers to supply the best and the breeder to provide them. Keeping show-quality Koi drove the early Koi pioneers to investigate and develop methods and equipment to keep them in top condition – a very harmonious never-ending circle of learning and progress; very eastern, very Zen, very Japanese.

