

Giant horseshoe crab found off Nagasaki Prefecture

A giant horseshoe crab measuring 79.5 cm from head to tail, possibly the largest in Japan, has been found in the sea near the Kujukushima islands off Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture.

Horseshoe crabs are referred to in Japan as "living fossils." Officials at Kasaoka Horseshoe Crab Museum in Okayama Prefecture said the crab was one of the largest ever to be found in Japan.

The crab was caught up in a trawl net on Nov. 19, and handed over to the Saikai Pearl Sea Center aquarium, which has conducted studies of the Kujukushima islands.

The horseshoe crab's shell measures 35.3 cm in width and weighs five kilograms.

The largest horseshoe crab the museum confirmed in Japan to date measured 63 cm in length and weighed about 3.5 kilograms.

"There's a high possibility that this one is the biggest," an official from the museum said.

Museum officials said horseshoe crabs are arthropods that live in brackish water consisting of seawater and freshwater. In recent years, however, destruction of the environment and pollution has contributed to a decline in areas of brackish water, and the number of horseshoe crabs have declined in number as a result.

The Kasaoka-based Japanese Society to Protect Horseshoe Crabs said good environmental conditions around the Kujukushima islands probably allowed the crab to grow as large as it did.

"It's probably because it was in the Kujukushima islands, where nature hasn't been destroyed, that it grew this big," society chairman Keiji Tsuchiya said. (Mainichi)

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The giant horseshoe crab is pictured next to a person following its discovery off Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture. (Photo courtesy of Saikai Pearl Sea Center aquarium)