

Kelp: A Valuable Food Source

Along the rocky shore on the east side of Kushiro Bay, cold currents create ideal conditions for the growth of kelp. Many types of kelp are valued in Japanese cuisine for adding depth of flavor to soups and stocks, and rich kelp beds can be found along much of the east coast of Hokkaido. Some species, including *naga-konbu* (*Saccharina longissima*), *gaggara-konbu* (*Saccharina coriacea*), *gohei-konbu* (*Laminaria yezoensis*), and *nekoashi-konbu* (*Arthrothamnus bifidus*) are only found around Kushiro and Hokkaido's east coast. The most common species in the area is *naga-konbu*, also called ribbon weed, which can grow as long as 10 meters.

In addition to its value as a food source, kelp protects smaller fish from buffeting waves and provides shelter from larger predators along the rocky coast of Kushiro Bay. Fish also feed on species that live in kelp beds, such as mysid shrimp and plankton.