

The Macaques of Arashiyama Monkey Park

The current troop at Arashiyama Monkey Park consists of 120 wild Japanese macaques, including several infants that were born this past year. The macaques at the park give birth between late March and early September. The babies generally breastfeed for six to twelve months, but at three to four months they will also begin eating solid food and learning to forage by watching their mothers. Both adult males and females carry, groom, and protect the young in the troop. The park staff keep track of the babies born each year with a simple system: new monkeys are named by adding the year of their birth to the end of their mother's name. Using this system, park staff can easily identify the matriarchal lineage of each monkey.

Baby monkeys fend for themselves from a young age, but it takes 3.5 to 4.5 years for them to reach adulthood. Adult male macaques at the park weigh an average of about 13.5 kilograms and reach lengths of 57 centimeters, and the females average around 52 centimeters and weigh an average of 8.8 kilograms. Males in the wild leave their troop once they reach adulthood. Although there are occasional fights for dominance among the park monkeys, the alpha male is usually replaced only after dying of old age.

Most researchers believe macaques made their way to Japan from the Korean Peninsula, and although macaques no longer inhabit the peninsula, they can be found as far north as Aomori, just south of Hokkaido and on the other islands of Kyushu and Shikoku.