

A Life Devoted to Fish Breeding: 22 Years of Trial and Error

Introducing Fish to Lake Towada

Wainai Sadayuki was 27 when the Towada Mine where he worked as an administrator was transferred from public to private ownership in 1884. Finding himself a company employee rather than a civil servant, Wainai resolved to become an entrepreneur and launched a fish-breeding business alongside his day job. At that time there were no fish in Lake Towada, and Wainai's dream was to provide the thousands of miners who worked in the area with a healthy source of protein. He released multiple species of fish fry into the lake, but none managed to establish self-sustaining populations. Despite repeated setbacks, Wainai persisted with his efforts. [105]

[Captions (left column)]

Carp

Nikko trout

Char

Cherry trout

Kokanee

A Series of Failures

Between 1884 and 1890, Wainai released carp, char, goldfish, and crucian carp fry into Lake Towada. In 1897, after catching his first adult carp in the lake, he quit his job at the mine to devote himself full-time to fish breeding and began to ship carp to Kosaka and Kemanai for sale. When carp numbers in the lake plunged in 1899, however, that project ended in failure, and Wainai turned to breeding salmonids, such as trout and salmon. He incubated the eggs at an old school a few kilometers north of here in Ginzan, which he had converted into a hatchery with the help of his eldest son, Sadatoki, who had studied fish breeding in Nikko. In 1900 and 1901, Wainai released large numbers of cherry trout and Nikko trout fry into the lake, but once again met with no success. [137]

A Chance Encounter with Destiny

One day in 1902, while visiting the Aomori Fisheries Testing Center, Wainai overheard someone talking about the successful breeding of kokanee, a salmonid with a homing instinct, at Lake Shikotsu in Hokkaido. This was his chance. After discussing it with his wife, Katsu, Wainai sold whatever personal assets he could to raise funds. He then purchased 30,000 kokanee eggs from Lake Shikotsu, which he incubated and released

as fry into Lake Towada. Although in dire financial straits, Wainai and his wife were convinced that this time, finally, their efforts would be rewarded. [97]

[Captions (middle column)]

Lake Akan

1894

Lake Shikotsu

1902

Lake Towada

The Miracle of the Fishes

It was the autumn of 1905. Two long years had passed since Wainai released the fry into Lake Towada, and now the kokanee were returning to the lake in large numbers to spawn. At the age of 47 and after much blood, sweat, and tears, Wainai finally realized the dream he had first conceived at age 27: with the return of the kokanee, local fishermen were catching as many as a thousand fish a day. The inspiring story of Wainai's lifelong quest was made into a movie in 1950. [89]

Japanese Kokanee

A freshwater fish of the salmonid family, the Japanese kokanee is a subspecies of sockeye salmon that ended up landlocked in Hokkaido's Lake Akan and Lake Chimikeppu due to volcanic activity. Kokanee eggs from Lake Akan were first transplanted and released as fry into Lake Shikotsu, and they were later introduced to Lake Towada by Wainai Sadayuki. Kokanee have a homing instinct, meaning that they return to where they hatched to spawn. [73]