

## **Lake Ikeda's Cryptic Creatures and Colorful Cosmos**

Lake Ikeda is Kyushu's largest caldera lake. Its deep waters are inhabited by a protected species of giant eel and, according to legend, a giant monster named Issie.

The lake was formed by a series of volcanic eruptions about 5,700 years ago. These eruptions created a crater that filled with fresh water, eventually forming a lake about 15 kilometers in circumference with a maximum depth of 233 meters. According to local lore, these waters are home to mysterious creatures. Stories about a dragon god living in Lake Ikeda date to the early 1800s. In the mid-1900s, people began claiming to have witnessed a large, dark beast swim across the lake at high speed. The creature was given the name "Issie" as a nod to Loch Ness's famous cryptid, Nessie.

No dragons, serpents, nor any definitive proof of Issie has ever been found,

but Lake Ikeda is undeniably home to one kind of monster: giant mottled eels (*Anguilla marmorata*). These tropical eels can reach 1.8 meters in length and weigh up to 20 kilograms. As the largest eel species in Japan, they have been designated a Natural Monument by the city of Ibusuki.

Lake Ikeda is a popular spot for outdoor activities, including watersports, jogging, cycling, and (for cryptid lovers) monster hunting. Colorful flowers, including cosmos, poppies, pansies, sunflowers, and begonias, grow year-round along the shore. In January, naturalists and photographers come to Ibusuki to see the fields of rapeseed flowers that create a yellow carpet around Lake Ikeda.