

Science in the Language Class

Japanese

The Japanese Macaques

にほんざる

Japanese macaque
Macaca fuscata
nihonzaru
日本猿
にほんざる



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- Distribution:** Found on three of the four main islands - Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu and also on many of the smaller islands. The Japanese macaques are the most northern primate and often called snow monkeys.
- Habitat:** Adapted to a wide range of habitats – sub-tropical forest at the southern end of the distribution and sub-arctic forests at the northernmost.
- Diet:** They eat a wide variety of foods including fruits, berries, acorns, nuts, leaves, grasses, seeds, flowers, fungi, fish, spiders, insects, snails, crabs, eggs and other small animals.
- Breeding:**
- | | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| gestation | 6 months (time for baby to grow inside mum) | |
| litter size | usually 1 although 2 has been known | |
| lifespan | ~ 30 years | |
- Size:**
- | | | |
|-------------|-----------|-------------|
| length | male 57cm | female 52cm |
| tail length | male 9cm | female 8cm |
| weight | male 11kg | female 8kg |
- IUCN Red List Status:** Least Concern
- Main threats:** Although listed as least concern, the Japanese macaque does face some threats. Habitat loss is the main threat. Forests have been cleared for farmland and building roads. In the past the macaque was hunted for food and medicines. This is illegal but can still continue. The macaque can also be killed legally as a pest when found raiding crops.

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Interesting Facts:

Japanese macaques arms and legs are nearly equal in length and they walk on all four. They spend time in trees and on the ground.

Macaques have incisors – biting teeth, canines – killing teeth and molars – chewing and grinding teeth. They also have large cheek pouches to gather a lot of food.

Like most monkeys the macaques have opposable thumbs. They also have feet which are very similar to their hands with opposable big toes.

Japanese macaques live in large groups with around 20 to 100 animals. There is an alpha male and alpha female.

The macaques communicate with each other using many different sounds, body language and displays.

Japanese macaques have few predators. Eagles and some large owls may eat the young.

There is a subspecies of the Japanese macaques *Macaca fuscata yakui* which only lives on the island of Yakushima in southern Japan.

Folklore:

The three wise monkeys, 'see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil' are based on the Japanese macaque. The Japanese names mizaru, kikazaru and iwazaru mean 'see not monkey', 'hear not monkey' and 'say not monkey'.

see no evil, hear no evil and speak no evil
mizarukikazaruiwazaru

見ざる聞かざる言わざる

Some people believe the Japanese macaques can bring good luck. Many visitors to Japan go to a Buddhist monkey shrine where they hope that if they touch the image of the monkey, it will bring them luck.

There are many stories about the monkeys, and like most folktales they provide lessons to be learnt and morals to live by.

Recommended websites:

RZSS Highland Wildlife Park
highlandwildlifepark.org.uk

Arkive
arkive.org

IUCN Red List
iucnredlist.org

StampIT 'Language of Stamps' series
scottishphilately.co.uk/moodle

Recommended books:

Brazil, Mark. 2015, *Common and Iconic Mammals of Japan: Japan Nature Guides*

Miller-Schroeder, Patricia. 2014, *Animals on the Brink – Japanese Macaques: AV2books*

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