

# 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](http://highlandwildlifepark.org.uk)

**Arkive**  
[arkive.org](http://arkive.org)

**IUCN Red List**  
[iucnredlist.org](http://iucnredlist.org)

**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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