

Japan zoo takes on cockroach PR role

July 22 2015



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A Japanese zoo is trying to do the impossible—improve the image of cockroaches, putting on an exhibition of one of the world's most hated insects.

With a whopping—and disgusting—4,000 species around the planet, the hardy creature can survive almost anywhere, but is most commonly encountered by city-dwellers in grubby corners of the kitchen, or

roaming around the floor at night.

Staff at Shunanshi Tokuyama Zoo in Yamaguchi, western Japan, say the cockroach gets a bad press, and actually performs a vital job.

"They have such a negative image," a zoo spokeswoman told AFP. "But they're actually playing an important role in the food chain."

Important, but not very pleasant-sounding: eating rotting carcasses and dead plants on forest floors.

One highlight of the exhibition will be a five-way race among [cockroaches](#), where visitors can watch the worryingly speedy bugs whizz down a track.

If that's not entertainment enough—hard to credit—the zoo is offering the chance to get your hands on a Madagascar Hissing Cockroach, which can grow as long as 7 centimetres (two-and-a-half inches).

No need to worry about this, though, assures the [zoo](#)—Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches can't fly. But they can hiss.

The exhibition has around 200 creatures from a total of 15 species on display, and is already proving popular, the spokeswoman said, adding 70 to 80 percent of visitors are stopping by.

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Citation: Japan zoo takes on cockroach PR role (2015, July 22) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-07-japan-zoo-cockroach-pr-role.html>

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