

# Selecting a Young Bekko

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*With credit to Kate McGill, ZNA and BKKS Certified Judge*

**B**ekko (which means “Tortoise Shell”) are either white (Shiro), red (Aka), or yellow (Ki) koi with black (sumi) markings. Shiro Bekko is the most commonly seen, and the Ki Bekko is very rare. The preferred quality of sumi in Bekko is the same as those in Sanke, i.e., arranged like a set of stepping stones in a Japanese garden. There has to be a moderate number of sumi markings to help create the Bekko’s appearance of being neat, tidy, and elegant. Because of the simplicity of the coloring and pattern, the criteria in selecting for quality are quite severe.

Novice koi keepers can easily confuse the Bekko with an Utsurimono, especially if the Utsurimono is of the variety with big white markings. It is also common to confuse correct recognition of an Aka Bekko and an Aka Sanke. Think of a Shiro Bekko as being a Sanke without the red (hi) markings. Sumi on the body of a Bekko is mainly confined above the lateral line. The markings tend to be discrete, smaller and more rounded than those of Showa or Utsurimono. In those koi, the sumi on the body tends to be quite extensive, jagged and dramatic in appearance, and wraps around the whole body. It is unusual to see sumi on the head of a Bekko, particularly on the nose area. Sumi markings on the pectoral fins, when present, appear as light stripes (Tejima), never as solid wedges at the fin joints (motoguro). Sumi inside the mouth is unlikely of a Bekko, but is expected in an Utsurimono or Showa.

At first glance, an Aka Sanke is hard to distinguish from an Aka Bekko. On close inspection, somewhere on an Aka Sanke there will be a solid line between red and white skin, either over the nose, near the tail or below the lateral line. Aka Bekko may have a pale belly and white fins, but nowhere on the head or body will you see a definite line between white and red.

Shiro Bekko should have a true white base, without any yellowing. Unfortunately, a common problem for Shiro Bekko is the development of a yellow head. When selecting a young Bekko, not a single hi marking (however faint) is permissible. Also avoid any young Aka Bekko or Ki Bekko with the slightest indication of small white markings or breaks on the ground of red or yellow. In small Bekko, the sumi markings might not have full luster and might even still be “submerged.” Where the sumi is still submerged, it will appear bluish.

Select youngsters with well defined sumi markings arranged along the length of the body. Bear in mind that the sumi markings of the young Bekko will have to remain substantial enough in size and arrangement when it has grown big. If the size and pattern of the markings are insipid in a young Bekko (regardless of their quality), the Bekko will have an even more insipid appearance when it is an adult. It should be immediately apparent that the sumi markings, viewed



individually, will be strong, but also that the pattern of those markings will nevertheless be elegant. Too much Tejima, or ojima (stripes in the tail) are not attractive. If they appear bold in a young Bekko, they might gain the desired definition later on, but this can never be guaranteed.

Bekko is a good class of koi to bring to a show as a potential prize winner, as not too many are bred these days. An interesting koi. ❖