

Research Activity Report
Yakushima Field Training Course - Kyoto University, 2014

2014. June, 11	
Affiliation/Position	PhD Student, Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore
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1. Country/location of visit
Kyoto University, Japan
2. Research project
A candidate collection of insect species which make up the Yakushima monkey diet.
3. Date (period of stay in Japan)
2014. May. 12 – 2014. June. 13 (32 days)
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Dr. Shiro Kohshima, Professor at Wildlife Research Center, Kyoto University
5. Progress and results of your research/activity (You can attach extra pages if needed)
Please insert one or more pictures (to be publicly released). Below each picture, please provide a brief description.
<p>The field research carried out by the various teams in Yakushima island were inter-connected with the common thread of understanding feeding ecology of the Yakushima macaques (<i>Macaca fuscata yakui</i>), an endemic monkey species from this island. Our group's field-work revolved around insects, with the larger aim of understanding the insects eaten by the Yakushima macaque. Our specific concerns were to make a large collection of insects found on the island, as a database of potential species eaten by the macaque. We were also interested in insects which contaminate monkey feces in the environment. We used several insect capture methods to meet these aims and were successful in our preliminary attempt at creating a candidate list of insect orders. The results from our study formed an essential input to the fecal metagenomics work carried out in the genome training course.</p> <p>Field-work as a part of the insect team was a great opportunity to visually see the diversity of insects in Yakushima. It was a fun experience as we got to visit several different locations on the island while sampling for insects. Traveling between various sites during field-work gave me a sense of the island's landscape - mountains, water-bodies, beaches and rocky shores. We were met with breathtaking views at every turn of the road, picture post-card memories that I will remember for a long time. During our stay we also got to take a peek at other animals inhabiting the island - the Yakushima macaque, the Yakushika, bats and loggerhead turtles. The field course ended with presentations by each team, which brought the big picture into perspective, and we were able to make connections across individual research groups.</p> <p>Apart from the field research undertaken, and the incredible landscape we were working in, one of my most memorable experiences in Yakushima was working among a large group of students and lecturers. Not just in terms of the research group I belonged to, but living and working in the field station as a large extended family. It never occurred to me that we were different in our culture, age or research backgrounds. Everybody's participation was exemplary - be it in setting up the dinner table, making the research presentation or the final barbecue party. I should especially thank all the Japanese students in the Yakushima group, for being such sportive company, and making us feel completely at home. My experiences in Japan over the last month will be one of those personal milestones for me, and the Yakushima trip has a big contribution in making it so special.</p>

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6. Others

The insect team was the smallest among all the research teams, and was the perfect group with two international and two Japanese students. All four of us started from scratch during this research project, having close to no experience in entomology. We have to thank all our lecturers for helping us during field-work, and Okamoto San and Yumoto San for answering the silliest of our questions during insect identification.

The experiences shared with the Munira, Yoshi and Sota are really special to me - the motion-sickness, dish washing, cleaning up after the overflowing washing machine, the night spent catching fire-flies, butterfly chasing, being petrified of fat cockroaches and fluttering hawk-moths and an entire night spent playing しりとり and Janken. A big heart-felt thank you to all of you for these happy memories.



Chasing insects near Yoggo valley with Prof. Kohshima

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At a site where we set up baited pit-fall traps (with Kishida San, Sota, Munira, Yoshi, Okamoto San and the ubiquitous grey van)