

<b>Affiliation/Position</b>	Primate Research Institute/D2/L4
<b>Name</b>	Josue Alejandro Pastrana

<b>1. Country/location of visit</b>
Kyoto University Hütte, Sasagamine Niigata Prefecture, Japan
<b>2. Research project</b>
PWS Sasagamine Field Course
<b>3. Date (departing from/returning to Japan)</b>
2017. 09. 29 - 2017. 10. 02 (4 days)
<b>4. Main host researcher and affiliation</b>
Prof. Shigeru Sugiyama, PWS
<b>5. Progress and results of your research/activity</b>
<p>As one of the opportunities that the Leading Program in Primatology and Wildlife Science has to offer, I was able to attend for the first time to the Sasagamine Hütte Field course in the Niigata Prefecture on the last weekend of this past month. This course is offered in different seasons as the landscape drastically changes between summer, autumn and winter, providing for different activities depending on the time of year. The cabin nestled in the high altitude in the base of these mountains is surrounded completely by nature, surrounded by breathtaking mountain ranges, rivers, and many kinds of flora and fauna depending on the altitude ranges. I was hosted by Prof. Sugiyama, a scientist, anthropologist, naturalist, climber enthusiast, and an all-around knowledgeable person on various topics such as languages, history, politics, or not only Japan, but of the world.</p> <p>On the first day, we had a small hike down towards the valley in front of the cabin, where local people grow cattle in free ranging grass fed style, next to a pond, and a small river where cold clean water flows down from the mountain. We visited a shrine that is located next to the valley and I learned a lot about the different type of species of vegetation such as oak trees, wild grapes, wild blue berries, kiwis, watercress nuts, chestnuts, various kinds of flowers as well as many different type of insects such as spiders, dragon flies, and others. The highlight of this hike was seeing a young fox foraging around the shrine. That evening we cooked a Russian soup using local vegetables and talked about our schedule for the weekend, and prepared for the next days' excursion. During the first lecture, I was taught how to read maps without using today's portable technology, and how to use the topography of maps to locate yourself just in case one gets lost. I learned the convenient way to fold maps, the legends used in Japanese maps, and the difference between cardinal directions while walking vs how to read true cardinal points in the map. As I am thinking of moving from captive studies, to doing studies now in the wild in the second year of my PhD program, I thought this was very interesting and useful information to learn and apply in my academic/career path.</p> <p>On the second day we had an early morning excursion to the Karasawa Creek, northeast of the cabin, about a 3 hour hike up the mountain in a small creek between Mt. Hiuchi and Mt. Myoko Kogen. During this hike, we avoided hiking trails and went through the dense forest path as an exercise to understand and remember land points, as well as how to use the vegetation for one's own benefit such as climbing using branches and roots to climb steep part of the mountain. Also, periodically we stopped in landmarks, looked back, in order to try to remember where we came from. Once we hiked about 30min we reached a clearing in the creek where we could observe the debris left by avalanche along the creek and we climbed for a few hours up the stones that felt more like bouldering than hiking or mountain climbing. It was very peaceful in this hike, as there were no tourists or tours of people walking around, and we could really appreciate the nature surrounding the creek. Because the weather was so nice and the group was smaller than the previous course, we climbed an extra 30min up the mountain to get an even better view. As part of the practice, I was encouraged to lead that way back down to see if I could recognize the landmarks to return the same way we had climbed up and luckily we made it back. To my surprise, on our way back to the cabin we saw a group of Japanese macaques foraging grass and eating grasshoppers in the valley in front of the cabin. We took our cameras and got as close to the troop as much as we could, it was a multi-male multi female group, with about 2-3 adult males, around 15-20 adult females, 8-10 juveniles, and 5-6 infants for a total of 35-40 individuals. We spend a good time</p>

observing the group and taking pictures as they did not seem to mind us. That evening we prepared a fire, and had a course on preparing knots for various purposes such as climbing, holstering, supporting, and many other ways in which ropes can be used in trips into the nature. We talked about the big climb the next day of Mt. Hiuchi and prepared our bags and lunches for the next day.

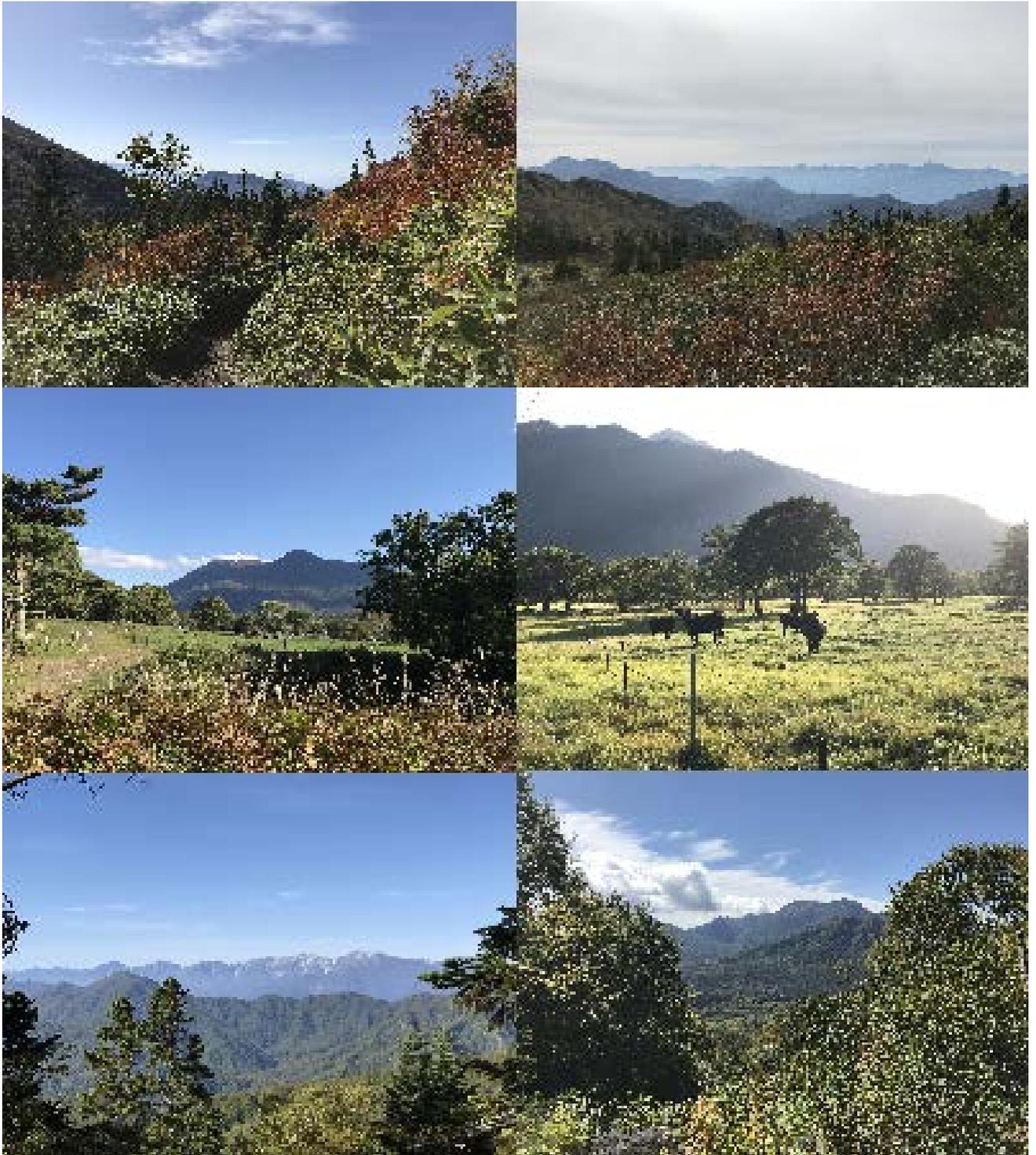
On our third day we woke up very early and after a hearty breakfast, we headed towards the mountain climb. During the climb we stopped at various landmark points such as plateau views, rivers, and designated rest areas. I learned how the different vegetated drastically changed after certain altitudes and how the weather also changed the higher we climbed. Surprisingly, it was very crowded and many groups of hikers were present in the trails. Once we arrived in the mountain top, we could see the various mountain ranges of the alps of Japan, and it was a breathtaking, beautifully contrasting colors between the very luscious green in lower and middle altitudes of evergreen vegetation; bright yellows, reds and browns on the changing autumn leaves in higher altitudes; as well as the whites seen in snow patches and exposed lime stones of some mountain tops. My favorite spot was a swampy area close to the mountain that was surrounded by a short grass, as it had various flowers, insects, and the most contrasting colors. The view was amazing as we could see big mountains such as Tateyama, Jizoyama, Tenguyama, Yanagiharadake, among many more. It was also impressive to look towards the north and see the Japan Sea coast from over 3,000 meters above sea level surrounded by protected vegetation, and one completely different such as small alpine bushes and Siberian alpine trees. We concluded the evening with a trip to a local hot spring, and another great dinner prepared from Prof. Sugiyama. We also worked on other rope uses and different knots used for rappelling or rock climbing using a harness, karabiners, and multiples ropes, rather than just knots using one rope. On the last evening, we were also very lucky to see a badger foraging in front of the cabin, we used very strong flash lights and were able to observe it from the desk undisturbed as it has very poor eyesight.

For the last day we reviewed all the knots we had studied during the trip, and used them out in the field. We went down to the valley with rope and a basic small 2-person tent. I used the knots that were taught to me during the weekend to set up a tent between two trees, without using pegs for the tent or hammers, and only using sticks found in the area. It was also another valuable practice to learn as I am sure I can use it in the future.

Sasagamine course is an incredible experience. One can learn about nature survival techniques, local flora and fauna, practical information and experience on mountain climbing, as well as enjoying the beautiful nature surrounding the cabin. I would strongly recommend anyone to visit this area and I am especially grateful to Prof. Sugiyama for hosting me, teaching me many things from cooking and nature to history and politics, as well as all the professors and staff of PWS for coordinating my travels and providing me with this great opportunity. I hope I have the chance to return in the winter and see the difference!



During the many lessons of Prof. Sugiyama at Sasagamine.



The many views around Sasagamine and Mt. Hiuchi.



Wild grapes, and healthy cooking with seasonal food, a fox sighting and as adult male from the local Japanese macaque troop.



Prof. Sugiyama on Karasawa Creek top, Sasagamine hutte, great food and local flowers.