

Research Activity Report
Supported by “Leading Graduate Program in Primatology and Wildlife Science”

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Affiliation/Position	Primate Research Institute/D2
Name	Cecile Sarabian

1. Country/location of visit
Japan, Kyoto University
2. Research project
First Kyoto workshop on evolutionary thanatology: an integrative approach to the study of death and dying
3. Date
2017. 03. 24
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Prof. Jim Anderson, Kyoto University
5. Progress and results of your outreach activity

Why did I join a workshop on Thanatology (- the scientific study of death and dying)? Not (only) for the creepiness of it. I was interested in the evolutionary approach of this workshop from a pathogen/disease avoidance point of view. In this interdisciplinary workshop, lots of the speakers referred to the response of subjects to conspecific's death and to the emotion/system of disgust, either through facts or anecdotally. For example, Prof. Jim Anderson started the session with a review on death/dead bodies management across animal taxa; Dr. Claire Watson reported case studies of Japanese macaque mothers carrying/gnawing on their dead infant; Dr. Dora Biro also reported on fly-swatting around corpses and corpse aversion by conspecifics in chimpanzees; and Dr. Naoko Matsumoto explained the burial practices of the Jomon people in Japanese prehistory.

The workshop counted 8 speakers coming from different fields such as cultural anthropology, primatology, social anthropology, paleoanthropology, and psychology, who talked about the responses to death in a variety of species (from insects, to non-human primates and elephants to humans) and time frames: contemporary, twenty-first century, and prehistory. The intimate nature of the workshop (8 speakers and about 10 attendees) gave the opportunity to have more questions and informal discussions than in a usual meeting – which I think allowed brainstorming on a lot of comments/ideas.

The most interesting to me was the interdisciplinary nature of this workshop. It exposed us, students in Primatology and Wildlife Science, to other disciplines than our own and to the different research methods used in what is to me a fascinating research subject. I would encourage to have more this kind of workshop in the future. It also gave me new ideas for my own research on pathogen avoidance in non-human primates, as well as the opportunity to develop potential collaborations. We spent the full day until the evening talking about death, and although the workshop killed us all, it was nice to gather after around some food and wine and prospect on a potential second workshop on evolutionary thanatology at Kyoto University...

Workshop weblink:
<http://www.wildlife-science.org/en/news/First-Kyoto-Workshop-on-Evolutionary-Thanatology=An-Integrative-Approach-to-the-Study-of-Death-and-Dying.html>

6. Others
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