

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

2018. 10. 13

Affiliation/Position	Wildlife Research Center (D1)
Name	Kristin Havercamp

1. Country/location of visit
Iriomote Island, Ryukyu Islands, Japan
2. Research project
PWS IRIOMOTE Island field course
3. Date (departing from/returning to Japan)
2018. 11. 07 – 2018. 11. 11 (5 days)
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Prof. MATSUZAWA Tetsuro, Prof. KOSHIMA Shiro, Assist. Prof. FUKUSHIMA Seiko; Kyoto University Prof. KAJITA, Assoc. prof. WATANABE, Assoc. prof. NARUSE, Assoc. prof. NAIKI; Ryukyus 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.
The Iriomote Island field course was an absolutely wonderful experience. It was the first time I visited one of the Okinawa Islands. We took five modes of transport (train, bus, plane, boat, car) to reach the Iriomote Station of the Tropical Research Biosphere Center of the University of Ryukyus, where we were staying. After a long first day of travelling, we attended the University of Ryukyus open seminar being held in the evening.
On our first full day on the island, we were able to take a boat ride past the mangrove trees along the Urauchi river and hike to beautiful waterfalls, where we ate our bentos we carried along the way. Along the hike there and back, I spotted quite a few lizards that I was told are classified as Endangered (see photo). In the afternoon, we visited the Iriomote Wildlife Conservation Center where we could read a lot about the endemic and rare Iriomote cat, among other animals, and the unique nature and wildlife on the island. I learned that DNA analysis indicates the Iriomote cat is closely related to the leopard cat group, having diverged tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of years ago. I was surprised to see how many cats die from road accidents each year; it seems as the number of tourists visiting the island increases, the number of road kill also increases.
The following day we prepared gear and went kayaking in the Nishida river (occasionally getting out to step in and feel the mud below the mangrove trees or to pat a giant tree buttress), parked our kayaks, then trekked for about an hour to reach the Pinaisara waterfall. We again carried our bento boxes along and were able to eat lunch on the rocks, right near a small waterfall that we eventually all swam under. On the kayak trip back, Watanabe-sensei showed us the really interesting root of mangrove trees - they are almost sponge-like and it is possible to blow air through them (if exerting a lot of pressure).
I have always loved the ocean and often think about sea-living animals, but almost never have the chance to go boating, kayaking or snorkeling. I have only gone snorkeling once in Mexico when I was about 17 years old, but in Iriomote I was able to observe sea creatures again! On our third full day, we collected our gear and went snorkeling. I spotted a poisonous sea snake and many small tropical fish among the corals, though the most impressive animal I saw was a giant sea slug (it moved surprisingly quick!). I really enjoyed swimming in areas that were extremely shallow and right next to a big drop-off where you can suddenly see into the deep, vast sea. I swam out as far as time would allow, only turning back after thinking about a giant shark appearing in the murky distance.
We were able to enjoy really tasty お弁当 every day for lunch, and dinner was always prepared for us, so we were very lucky. One night we even went to a cozy restaurant – it was delicious! Unfortunately, I did not bring a very good camera with me this time as I figured we would spend most of the time in or around the water, but please see some photos on the following pages, followed by many thank-you’s on the last page!

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Beautiful views on the way there.



Boating up the Urauchi River through mangrove forests



Another view from the boat.

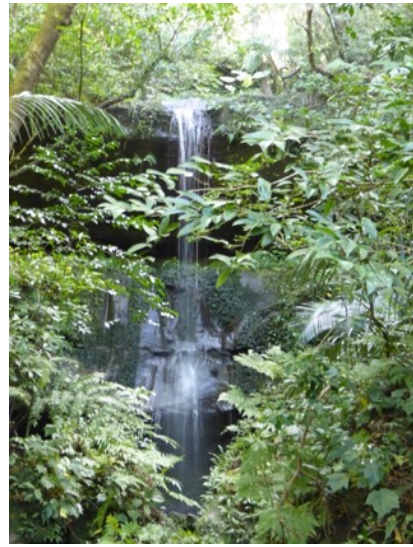


Hiking past an impressive buttress root.

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An endangered lizard (we spotted many!).



A small waterfall along the way.



Giant ferns, acorns and leaves!

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Getting ready to go snorkeling.



On the way to predetermined snorkeling spots.



Evening fishing and sunset viewing on top of an old (dead) coral rock.



On an afternoon walk past some bushy and soft looking trees, and during an evening walk in search of the Iriomote cat we instead stumbled upon a domestic goat.

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A taxidermy Iriomote cat and a map of their current status.



View from our University of Ryukyus home in Iriomote.

6. Others

I am very thankful to PWS for providing me with the opportunity to visit Iriomote Island. Thank you to Matsuzawa-sensei, Kohshima-sensei, Fukushima-sensei, Kajita-sensei, Watanabe-sensei, Naruse-sensei and Naiki-sensei for organizing the trip and planning a wonderful five days. Also, to Ishigaki-san, Imura-san, Kadena-san and Oka-san for assisting the trip. And to professors and students for making it a really enjoyable experience!