

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

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Affiliation/Position	Primate Research Institute, M1
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1. Country/location of visit
Sri Lanka
2. Research project
International Training Program on Primatology and Wildlife Conservation 2015
3. Date (departing from/returning to Japan)
2015. 07. 31 – 2015. 08. 17 (18 days)
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Dr. Michael Alan Huffman, Professor at Primate Research Institute, Kyoto University
5. Progress and results of your research/activity
<p>The International Training Program in Sri Lanka 2015 exceeded all my expectations! Sri Lanka has a fascinating culture, history, biological diversity in its fauna and flora, more so than I could ever have imagined. The only way to understand is to go there, but I will try my best to share my experiences during the trip.</p> <p>After a long journey from Japan to Sri Lanka, we arrived late in the evening to our first accommodation close to our host university in Maharagama, Sri Lanka. I had never seen so many statues of Buddha in one place, so meticulously decorated with brightly colored neon lights on the back, some with flowers and small offerings. It wasn't until I woke up the next morning that I realized how different and interesting place I was in for the first time in my life. From the sights, sounds, smells, surrounding our hotel, and the attitude of the local people, I could quickly understand that I was in a type of place I had never been to or experienced before. After one day of rest, preparations and a briefings, we started our program with an inauguration banquet where we attended lectures from various professors and universities, mainly speaking about the various biodiverse ecosystems that we would see during our trip, as well as a cultural event, a beautiful folkloric dance, performed by the university students. After a nice inaugural ceremony, we started our trip to the central Sinharaja rainforest, where we stayed in an ecological friendly lodge in the middle of the mountains. The place was a fantastic experience, we were able to see many endemic birds, small mammals, reptiles, as well as breathtaking views, as we were guided by 2 professors who are very active in conservation and know the area very well. They were able to guide us and give us lectures twice a day, and tell us the history of the rainforest and the ongoing research/outreach done to try to preserve it as much as possible. They were very informative lectures and we were all very impressed by the beauty of the forest. In the first 30 minutes of our hike into this rainforest, we saw snakes, various primates, an endemic and endangered jungle fowl, as well as a beautiful magpie. After a few days in the rainforest, we headed to the coast for our coral reef eco system module, but first we stopped at a turtle hatchery to release endangered new born turtles into the sea. It was a great experience to watch the turtles go into the sea at sunset with my colleagues and I will always remember that special day.</p> <p>The coral reef course was very different from our course at the rainforest, as we had to view the impact humans have done to the delicate ecosystem from the damage of too many tourists as well as poor management. After a snorkeling class at the pool, we went to the coral reef and saw how it has been damaged by boats and people walking over them, unaware of the diverse animals and plants living under the water. After a few days, we went to a coral reef that had been inaccessible to people for 3 decades due to a civil war, and we could easily see and compare a healthy coral reef eco system. In the healthy coral reef at Pigeon Island, we even got the opportunity to swim with wild sea turtles and around black-tipped sharks, it was an awesome experience and undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip.</p> <p>After a few days in the coast, we headed to the dry zone of the country on the east side, where it was a completely different environment, with different fauna and flora, it really felt as if we had moved to another continent just a few hours away by car. There we stayed a few days where we learned about the various primates living in temples, deserts, and forests. We were also able to go into jeep-safaris to 3 different national parks, where we not only saw various primate species, but also wild animals such as water buffalos, boars and elephants! Also, the views at the bungalow's at Lugunamwehere were just breathtaking, it was the most rustic stay of our trip but possibly the most beautiful scenery</p>

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I could ever wake up to during the program. There we learned about the elephant-human conflict and the bio-diversity of the dry zones. After our stay in the dry zone, we went to the highest point of the country in Ohiya. There we stayed among the clouds, where the temperature was very cold, and again, it was almost impossible to think that it was the same country. Here the animals at the national park of Horton Plains seemed to be of a different part of the world, such as large deer, other types of birds and plants, it almost seemed like it was Europe in the middle of South Asia. The landscape here was surrounded by untouched forests but also by agricultural plantations. It was a very unique and almost mystical place. Also, the vegetables and fruits we tried of this area were phenomenal.

Here in the last day before the closing ceremony, we were asked to give a 20min presentation on a topic that was assigned to us at the beginning of the program. I was assigned to talk about the Sinharaja rainforest we had visited in our first few days, with emphasis as to how it could be better managed. We all heard each other’s presentations and had a discussion of all the topics related to biodiversity and conservation. In the end we had the pleasure to see a video of our trip this far and I realized how fortunate we were for this great experience.

On our last day, we stayed at a hotel run by the Navy of Sri Lanka, where we had our final closing ceremony and we were awarded with a certificate of completion and some farewell gifts. It was a good activity but also filled with mixed feelings, as we had bonded as a group, learned so many things and did not want our exceptional trip to end. But in the end, we were very grateful that we were given this awesome experience, and that we were able to learn many things from the country, the kindness of its people and culture, as well as the incredible biological diversity that is easily accessible everywhere in this small island country.

I really enjoyed learning about many ecological systems, and how the human impact has affected and is still affecting its local fauna and flora. As I have an interest in measuring stress in primates living in different environments, it was great to see the similar topics in various species, not just macaques. It was also enlightening to see how the cultural traditions affect the environment differently than other countries in Asia, as well as how the local people revered certain animals more than other countries, such as certain species of primates over others. Elephants are very important to them but their forests are disappearing and it will be interesting to see how they manage their populations in the future. I really do hope I will be able to do some type of studies on primates in Sri Lanka in the future, and I think its potential for more research is great, as there are many groups of animals that have not been studied yet.

I am grateful to the professors who organized this extremely spectacular training program, the staff at Kyoto University, as well as our hosts in Sri Lanka. Thank you!!

6. Others



Elephant handler for the temples close to Colombo and the Sri Lankan folkloric dance at the inauguration ceremony.

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Guides and lectures at the Sinharaja Rainforest.



Releasing sea turtles at sunset with my colleagues in Sri Lanka.



ITP Sri Lanka group from Kyoto University with one of our local guides.

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Toque Macaque in the dry zone of Sri Lanka.



Deer in Horton Plains.

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Monkey family at the temple.



Colleagues enjoying the nice view on top of the mountain in Horton Plains.