

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

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1. Country/location of visit
Portugal, Estoril
2. Research project
The 35th International Ethological Conference ("Behaviour 2017")
3. Date
2017. 07. 30 – 2017. 08. 04
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Rui Oliveira – ISPA
5. Progress and results of your research activity
<p>“Behaviour” conferences are held once every two years and gather scientists studying animal behaviour from all around the world. Behaviour 2015 was held in Cairns, Australia and Behaviour 2019 will be held in Chicago, USA. This year, the congress was held in the small coastal town of Estoril, Portugal at the Estoril Congress Center and gathered about 900 researchers working on organisms as diverse as <i>C. elegans</i>, bumble bees, cichlid fish, vampire bats, geckos, tits, goats, mouse lemurs, humans and more.</p> <p>I very much enjoyed the talks I attended and those triggered new research / collaborations ideas to me. Some of my favorite sessions were on prey-predator interactions and how predators learn to avoid aposematic and toxic preys. These are very much related to studies on pathogen avoidance because the predators must recognize and avoid food sources potentially pathogenic. As such the question of what is innate versus what is learnt and reasons behind it were part of the discussion after the talks. For example, birds rely on demonstrators to learn which prey are palatable and which prey they should avoid. This socially learnt strategy may function similarly as in humans where young individuals need to be exposed to those toxic / pathogenic substances to build their immune system. Experiments with goats show that they use principally their sense of probing to detect and avoid caterpillars (with urticating hair) on their food. This study investigated the different senses involved by putting a bandana on the eyes of the goats or some anesthetic cream on the goat’s lips – methods that some primatologists may envy...</p> <p>Another symposium I enjoyed very much was “understanding how pathogens transmit and their effects on host behaviour”, organized by two PhD students from The Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology – Doris Wu and the German Primate Center – Filipa Paciência. This symposium gathered talks on the understudied topic of malaria in chimpanzees, syphilis and sexual behaviours avoidance in baboons, sickness and sociality in wild house mice and mating behaviour influenced by pathogens via the Major Histocompatibility Complex. Here again I enjoyed the methods used: sleeping between trees at 37 m in the Ivory Coast rainforest canopy with a vacuum cleaner in order to collect mosquitoes; and rating images of baboon buttocks from the most disgusting to the less (severely infected with syphilis versus not) and see how this affect male mounting behaviours.</p> <p>This conference was also the occasion to organize another MPI-PRI dinner with students, post-docs and researchers from the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. We were 20 in total and this time, other students from WRC and Kyoto University main campus joined as well. We had a very enjoyable Italian/Portuguese dinner and had lots of interesting and fun discussions... We organize those dinners at every international conference we can where both institutions meet and catch up on research progress. Matthias Allritz (MPI/University of St Andrews) and I organized this dinner. The previous one was in Chicago for IPS last year.</p> <p>The conference also offered an ideal setting with the beach 5 minutes from the venue, incredible food and drinks, perfect weather, and lots of post-conference activities such as Fado – traditional Portuguese music from Lisbon, beach party with all other attendees, or the conference party with a live band, and then a DJ... I found people to be incredibly friendly (well, except some taxi drivers – make sure you ask for an invoice and don’t pay extras...) so in sum, a definitely enriching experience!</p>

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Left: Fado night in Lisbon, right: chimpanzee termite fishing techniques in Goulougo Triangle, Congo

6. Others

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank PWS for supporting this trip and the organizers and volunteers for the great conference.