

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

2019. 10. 24

Affiliation/Position	Wildlife Research Center (D2)
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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)
2019. 10. 16 – 2019. 10. 20 (5 days)
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Prof. KOHSHIMA Shiro, Prof. YUMOTO Takakazu, Assist. Prof. FUKUSHIMA Seiko; Kyoto University Prof. KAJITA, Assoc. prof. WATANABE, Prof. IZAWA, Assoc. prof. NAIKI, ISHIGAKI-san, IMURA-san; Ryukyus Uni
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.
<p>This October, I was very lucky to have the opportunity to visit Iriomote, one of the Yaeyama Islands, for the second time. Since I felt I had a basic familiarity with Iriomote after last year’s visit, I took it upon myself to read a lot more and ask more questions during the trip to gain a deeper understanding of the local history and cultures. During this year’s field course, to my surprise, we participated in many different activities compared to last year.</p> <p>After 12 hours of travelling, we reached the Iriomote Station of the Tropical Research Biosphere Center of the University of Ryukyus where we were welcomed and attended the open seminar being held in the evening, given this time by Kohshima-sensei. During the first full day, we visited a limestone cave(!) where we walked, sometimes crawled, through very dark tunnel-like systems. I’ve always been fascinated by caves and wondered what it would be like to explore such a place, so that was really exciting for me as we did not get the chance to visit one last year (see photos beginning on next page). After leaving the cave we went kayaking and hiked to Pinaisara Falls.</p> <p>On our second full day, we took the Urauchi River boat cruise and trekked to the Kanbire waterfalls – it was interesting for me to return to the same hiking trail and scenic spots, as I remembered many of the smaller waterfalls and trees with special buttresses that we passed. After the boat ride, we went snorkeling at Hoshisuna-no-hara (star sand) beach, which we did not visit last year. The bay near Hoshisuna-no-hara was somewhat shallow, so we had to swim carefully to avoid touching any corals. This gave us a close-up look of many fish, which I often thought looked as though they were guarding a small entry hole to their residence(?) in the coral. Some of my favorite memories was when I spotted a pair who looked almost identical swimming around in synchrony, and a moment when one fish I had tried to follow was swimming along (seemingly peacefully, minding their own business) and suddenly another bigger fish popped out of nowhere, as if she/he were a cranky neighbor, and chased my focal away :’).</p> <p>I learned a lot during our last full day, thanks to a very interesting and informative talk by Izawa-sensei about the Iriomote cat (Yamaneko). We went to see the camera traps set up, collected the SD cards (also one relatively fresh scat sample that we found) and sorted through the video footage captured during the past month. We split into teams to record which animals were present in the footage – we found many Yamaneko, wild boars and birds. We were also given an already dried Yamaneko scat sample that we could sort through, and I was so surprised to be able to reconstruct part of the skeleton of a bird from it (see photo)!</p> <p>During Izawa-sensei’s talk and our visit to the Iriomote Wildlife Conservation Center, we learned that the number of Iriomote cats who died from road accidents was the highest this past year (2018). It is not clear whether this is due to the drastic increase in the number of tourists visiting each year, but that is certainly an issue the local people and wildlife conservation team/researchers are dealing with as the number of tourists visiting the island (more than 150,000 per year) vastly outnumber local residents (around 2,400 people).</p>

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Making our way to Iriomote – and my favorite, 海ぶどう !



The entrance we took into the limestone cave. // The much smaller hole we exited from!

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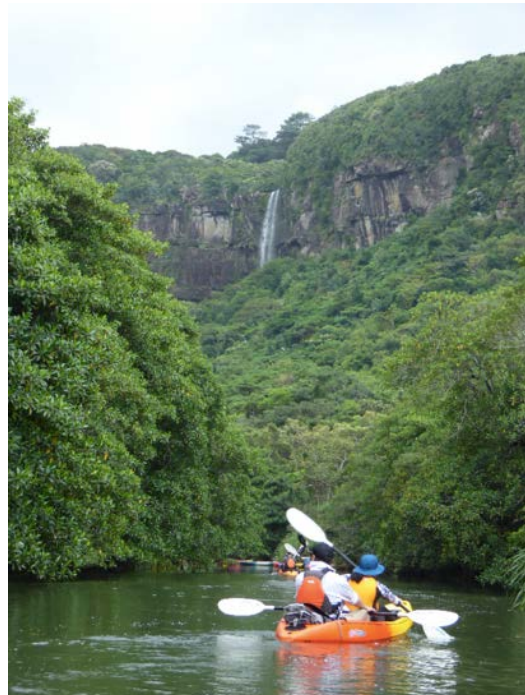


Difficult to see – a giant centipede in the cave. // We walked through ankle-deep water and crawled under small areas.



Not the best photo, but it's possible to see the eel we spotted in the cave.

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Kayaking our way to Pinaisara Falls (the highest waterfall in Okinawa – around 55m). In Okinawa dialect this means something like “old man’s beard”.



My kayak ‘engine’ ;-) and having fun at the falls.

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View of Kanbire waterfalls on our hike after getting off the Urauchi River boat.



We passed beautiful ferns and buttress roots on our trek.

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Photos of coral and fish from my underwater film camera!



Snorkelers :-)

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Camera traps and yamaneko scat (dark scat on the right = fresh feces, to the left = old feces).



Sorting through already dried yamaneko scat, we could see that they had eaten some sort of bird.



We passed “Umi Gorilla” on a walk to the village...

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6. Others

I am very thankful to PWS for providing me with the opportunity to visit Iriomote Island. A big thank you to Fukushima-san, Kohshima-sensei, Yumoto-sensei, Kajita-sensei, Watanabe-sensei, Izawa-sensei, Naiki-sensei, Ishigaki-san and Imura-san for organizing the trip and planning a wonderful five days. I hope to return again, someday!