



Oso
Bär
Björn
Orso
Björn
Samxe
熊
Bhalou
Αρκτος

Urs
Ours
Медведь
Bea
Medved
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Shash
Béruang
Karhu
Bear

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Courage and determination pay off in a ground-breaking study of Himalayan brown bears.
See the full story on page 17.

IBA websites: www.bearbiology.org www.bearbiology.com
Ursus website: www.ursusjournal.com

Collaboration and Exchange with Japan – Good for Everyone

Diana Doan-Crider
Email: diana.crider@gmail.com

Michael R. Vaughan
Email: mvaughan@vt.edu

Mei-hsiu Hwang
Email: hwangmh@mail.npust.edu.tw

In November of 2008, we were invited by Toru Oi and his collaborators to participate in the workshop "The Mechanism of the Intrusion of Bears into Residential Areas". While the main objective was for exchange of knowledge and ideas, we have to admit that we partook of the vastly enriching and interesting culture of Japan. Lynn Vaughan accompanied Mike, mainly as a chaperone – we're sure – to keep the rest of us in line.

We were pleasantly surprised by the level of collaboration taking place between Japanese bear researchers and managers, and learned more than we can convey with words – but we will try. The Japan Bear Network (see inset) sets a prime example of effective collaboration, and it is apparent that our Japanese peers are taking great strides to accomplish their goals. We felt privileged to share our own research interests and findings, and look forward to more collaboration in the future. A part of our visit included a public presentation, which was a most unusual, but educational and a fun experience. We (Diana, Mei, Mike and Lynn) were in a room filled with well-over a hundred Japanese speaking people, and none of us could understand a word being said. Mind you, Mei-hsiu, who is from Taiwan, does not speak Japanese, which was much to Diana's dismay when she learned that Japanese is not the same as Chinese, and was counting on Mei to translate and help her get around the city.

While we did have translators for the public presentation, it was a comical flash-back to a John Belushi skit where we heard a mix of rapid-fire Japanese, chuckling and laughing, and the occasional mention of "Mike-san" or "Diana-san." However, we were treated with the utmost honor, and sat confidently knowing that nobody was really making fun of us – we think. The workshops were all presented in English, which was very kind of our peers to do such a favor for the few of us. Nevertheless, they all handled the challenge with huge smiles and great presentations.

Japan is an amazingly beautiful and diverse country. From the low-lying coastlands to the high, sparsely populated mountains overlooking the Sea of Japan, we were surprised to see a different side of this country than what we have seen on TV and in books. We saw miles and miles of steep mountains, and undeveloped and diverse forests that included important bear foods such as oaks and beechnuts. In addition, it was nice to learn about the peoples that still reside in the high mountains, and of their interactions with a seemingly expanding and growing bear population.

It goes without saying that we also experienced an incredible menu, from every kind of noodle imaginable, sushi, home-cooked countryside stews, "Okonomiyaki" (a delicious cabbage pancake), sake, and plum wine, the best remedy for a cold (or even if you don't have one). We all learned to use the Japanese subway (and no, everything is NOT written in English, as the American travel guides indicate). We were housed in a very nice hotel located in downtown Kyoto, which is a metropolitan experience in itself. We noticed that the streets and cities were spotless, nobody jay-walked (except for us), everyone was polite, and people didn't have to lock up their bikes. Later, Mike and Lynn headed for Nara to tour the incredible temple and village, and hiked for hours.

Mei, Diana, and the wonderful Taiwanese Dr. Ying Wang were hustled

to the high mountains with a passle of fun-loving Japanese students, where they stayed in a traditional lodge alongside a beautiful creek. They slept on the floors, shared traditional bathrooms, and had the longest and best meal ever had on the planet. We all seemed to cope very well with the diverse and raw sea creatures that were served on our platters, which were decorated so nicely that it made you feel bad to eat them. We toured the beautiful temples of Kyoto, hiked to sacred temples in the mountains, and spent an incredible time soaking in the peacefulness of Japan's gardens and natural landscapes. It was autumn, so the brightly colored Japanese maples were at their peak. We also saw traditional Maiko in the historic district of Kyoto, and learned about Japan's oldest forms of music and dance. We shopped in downtown markets, the Japanese Dollar Store, and visited the largest vegetable and seafood markets imaginable.

Diana became obsessed with learning about the homeland of famous Japanese movie monster and her childhood hero, Gamera, but was disappointed to find out that he had been replaced by a younger and cartoon-like version. Nevertheless, she is grateful for Toru Oi's endless perseverance in trying to find her a Gamera tee shirt. She also learned that "Godzilla" is really pronounced "Godjira," which is something that any respectable Japanese monster movie buff should know.

In a nutshell, the level of respect and hospitality that we received goes beyond words. We would encourage any IBA'er to visit this great country, and become enlightened to what our Japanese counterparts have to offer. You will learn that their hospitality is beyond belief, their culture is incredibly rich, the friendships are sincerely immeasurable, and the research is very interesting. You will also learn that Japan has more in common with the rest of us than you think. We're all ready to go back! 🐻