

I am a seabird scientist and Junior research Fellow at the University of Oxford (UK). I spent one month in Japan in August 2018 as a JSPS short-term postdoctoral fellow. My host was Prof Yutaka Watanuki at Hokkaido University, a world-leading expert in seabird ecology. I was visiting him to carry out a collaborative project investigating the navigation skills of seabirds. Seabirds fly thousands of km each year across the oceans, navigating their way across apparently featureless seas – how they do that is currently poorly understood.

During my visit I first spent a week in my host's lab in the Hakodate campus of the university, where I discussed research plans and gave a lecture to graduate students. Hakodate is a charming town, where I enjoyed delicious seafood (Hakodate is particularly well known for squid). Hokkaido is also less hot than the rest of Japan, which in August is very much enjoyable.

Unfortunately, a short field trip to Daikoku Island (eastern Hokkaido), where I was planning to set up a new project with Japanese colleagues, had to be cancelled due to a typhoon heading our way. I spent the rest of my fellowship doing research on Awashima Island (Niigata prefecture), running navigation experiments on streaked shearwaters. These are beautiful seabirds which breed on the island and come back to their nest after nightfall. Awashima is a lovely island with two small villages, mostly inhabited by fishermen. There I lived in a traditional house shared with other researchers. I tried the local delicacy called Wappani (fish soup cooked with rocks). The weather in Japan this summer was unusual and so I also experienced a few more typhoons and even had to be evacuated from our house for 24h due to the risk of landslide, but all was well in the end. Overall, I had a fantastic if eventful stay and I cannot wait to return to Japan in the future.

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Our field site on Awashima Island. (photo: Annette Fayet)



A streaked shearwater on Awashima – the object of my studies. (photo: Aimee Van Tatenhove)