

## **JSPS Fellow experience by Diana Bowler**

Research location: Kyoto University

Department: Laboratory of Ecological Information, Graduate School of Agriculture

Host Research: Professor Hiroshi Amano

Placement length: One year

### **1. Research in Japan**

Any research fellowship is a great opportunity. A research fellowship in Japan makes everything more fun. I was based in the Laboratory of Ecological Information, headed by Professor Amano, at Kyoto University. I found that through a combination of the organization of JSPS, Kyoto University and my research group, jumping through a few bureaucratic hoops and getting started with life in Japan was made very easy.

My research involved using a simple laboratory system (herbivorous spider mites and predatory mites) to test some general ideas on how predator density, and cues of density, affects the anti-predator strategies of the prey. After an initial learning curve (mostly learning how to handle the mites without accidentally killing them...), I conducted a series of experiments that show investment in anti-predator behaviour (dispersal and reduced time spent foraging), and sub-lethal effects of predators (reduced fecundity) increase with predator density. My research adds to the body of evidence that shows indirect effects of predators on prey are important, and demonstrates that these indirect effects can be predator density-dependent.

At least based on my personal experience, working in a Japanese university is quite different from in a UK university. Most things are centered very much around the research group, and so seminars, social events etc... are usually always with your close colleagues. This has quite a few positives in that you are made to feel very welcome and you have people to ask when you need help. But it does mean that it can make it difficult to meet other people in the university; a bit of effort is needed for that but there are various international events to help you.

### **2. Life in Japan**

Kyoto is probably the most beautiful city in Japan, and so I am extremely lucky that I lived there for a year. Since I travelled quite a lot throughout Japan during my year, I am pretty confident that I would have enjoyed living in Japan had I been anywhere.

Kyoto is a great place to explore, with lots of interesting-looking side streets, beautiful gardens, temples and shrines, and usually something interesting going on along the Kamo river. As the seasons of the year are very distinct, the red

leaves in autumn being particularly beautiful, there was always something new and interesting to come across while cycling around. There are some great traditional festivals in Kansai, and plenty of opportunities in the city to participate in traditional Japanese culture e.g. tea ceremony, ikebana. Food, and the diversity of it, is also one of the great pleasures in Japan. Kyoto is famous for its local traditional vegetables and tofu. I can't say I did much cooking while I lived in Kyoto.



Kyoto University in late December



Ginkakuji – near the university – in the Autumn