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I think one of the most important aspects of science is building new collaborations – especially if those collaborations involve people with slightly different research interests as it is amazing how an ‘outside view’ can stimulate interesting ideas and new areas to focus on. As I try to utilise a wide range of techniques such as molecular analyses, ecological methods and computer modelling to answer novel questions that are vital in halting the current loss of biodiversity I am always on the lookout to form new collaborative links. Although my research focuses on bats I have been fortunate enough to come to Japan on a JSPS short term research fellowship to collaborate with Professor Takeshi Furuichi (Head, Section of Social Systems Evolution) and Professor David Hill (Center for International Collaboration) at the Primate Research Institute. My aim was to investigate the social system of a forest bat species that exhibits fission-fusion behaviour, and to determine the influence of resource availability and distribution on the dynamics of that behaviour. How does my work on bats relate to primates? Well, the aim of my work is to assess the extent to which theoretical models and hypotheses developed to explain fission-fusion societies in other mammals, especially chimpanzees and bonobos (an area in which Professor Furuichi is a leading expert), can explain patterns of fission-fusion observed in this bat species. Bats are extremely difficult to study and there are only a few known examples of fission-fusion societies. As a result there is very little information available to help explain this behaviour which will aid conservation management decisions in the future. We hope that by using examples based on other species we will be better placed to understand and develop models of our own to explain the observed patterns in behaviour.

During my seven month stay I carried out fieldwork on Yakushima Island (where I witnessed a number of typhoons first hand!) and carried out laboratory work at the Wildlife Research Center (University of Kyoto) which allowed me to work with a lot of other colleagues who all had different research interests ranging from linking gene expression with behavioural traits in dogs to the genetic diversity of grasscutters (also known as the greater cane rat, *Thryonomys swinderianus*) in Ghana. This was a highly valuable experience as I not only got to carry out some great research and form some new collaborations I was also able to experience what life is really like in Japan (which is never really possible over a couple of weeks holiday). Japan is such an amazing country and despite the obvious language barriers people are very helpful and friendly. It does help to put in a bit of effort and learning a few phrases, especially with things like doing shopping, using public transport etc. Overall, I think the best advice I can give is just to enjoy the experience and make sure you fully immerse yourself in the food and culture, it really makes all the difference.