

Research Activity Report
Supported by “Leading Graduate Program in Primatology and Wildlife Science”
 (Please be sure to submit this report after the trip that supported by PWS.)

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Affiliation/Position	Primate Research Institute/D2
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1. Country/location of visit
Belgium/ Antwerp
2. Research project
13th International Conference on Molecular Epidemiology and Evolutionary Genetics of Infectious Diseases
3. Date (departing from/returning to Japan)
2016.05.09-2016.05.16 (8 days)
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
Michel Tibayrenc (IRD Center, France)
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>The 13th International Meeting on Molecular Epidemiology and Evolutionary Genetics of Infectious Diseases (MEEGID XIII) was held at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium. This conference is unique in its kind, as it gathers research in all sorts of pathogens under the umbrella of molecular evolution. Talks this year covered population genetics, evolution, bioinformatics, whole genome sequencing analysis and –omic analyses. Organized by Elsevier, the conference’s structure included plenary talks in the morning, and specialized symposia and poster sessions in the afternoon. Plenary talks were very diverse and several of them covered current global health issues, such as Zika virus and the West African Ebola outbreak.</p> <p>Our talk “Gastrointestinal parasite sharing in multi-host primate communities” was presented in the symposium on helminth biology and evolution, and it was chaired by Serge Morand and Thomas J. Crellen. Presenting our latest results was an excellent opportunity to get feedback and suggestions from experts in the field, talk to publication’s authors that I could finally assign a face to, and discuss with people going through similar technical struggles as me.</p> <p>Despite being a very diverse meeting, communications were not shallow, and there was a great incentive to ask questions and start interesting debates that most of the time extended over coffee breaks. Its size also allowed people to approach others easily and get to know most of the participants by the end of the event. So all together, it was a fantastic experience for me.</p> <p>This was also my first time in Belgium, and Antwerp is such a beautiful city! During a walking tour offered by the conference, we were told that the name of the city comes from an old legend that tells the story of a soldier named Brabo that killed a giant who asked money from people who wanted to cross the bridge over the river. The giant would cut off one hand of people who refused to pay and throw it into the river. Because of this, Brabo cut the giant’s hand too and threw it into the river. In Dutch, Antwerp is “Antwerpen” which sounds very similar to “Hand werfen” meaning “throwing a hand”. The story is depicted in a statue in front of the City Hall (Fig. 1), but it does not end there. Some years ago, during construction work carried in front of the City Hall, huge bones were found, which would have confirmed the story of the giant... if only these had not belonged to a whale!</p> <p>I also had the opportunity to visit Antwerp Zoo, Belgium’s oldest zoo and one of the oldest in the world (Fig. 1). It is under the wing of The Royal Society of Antwerp, which is also the worldwide breeding coordinator for golden-headed lion tamarins, okapis, bonobos and Congo peacocks. I had never seen an okapi before, and learnt that the first one arrived in the zoo in 1919, having being discovered in the former Belgian Congo. Discussions about whether animals should be kept in zoos are always controversial, but I found very interesting that for years this zoo has supported a project in DRC to protect okapis. And when this reserve was taken over by poachers in 2012, where guards as well as all okapis were killed, the zoo coordinated efforts to re-launch this project.</p>

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Fig. 1. Antwerp City Hall and Brabo, one of the symbols of the city (top). Antwerp Zoo (middle) and some of the animal species living there: spider monkey, Komodo dragon and okapi (bottom). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to PWS and Prof. Matsuzawa for supporting my attendance to this conference. I would also like to thank Michel and Elsevier for the impeccable organization that let us switch smoothly from one talk to another without missing a second!