

Research Activity Report
Supported by “Leading Graduate Program in Primatology and Wildlife Science”

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1. Country/location of visit
Japan/Kyoto University
2. Outreach project
Conserv'Session#8: The Cove / Behind The Cove
3. Date
2017. 06. 03
4. Main host researcher and affiliation
none
5. Progress and results of your outreach activity

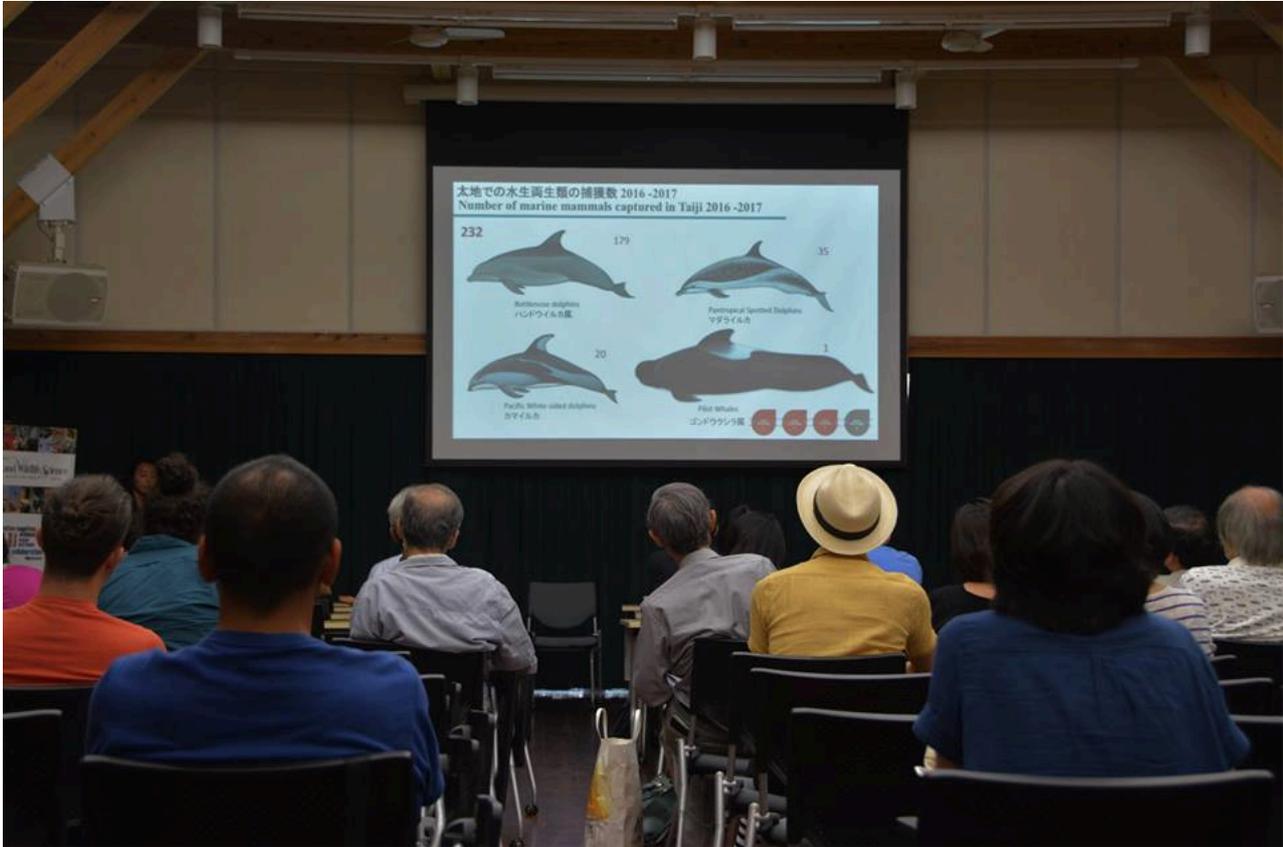
Since the start of Conserv'Session at Kyoto University (October 2016), the idea of a session on the dolphin drive hunt happening in Taiji, Wakayama prefecture was in our mind. Given the sensitivity of this topic, we waited to gain experience with a few sessions before proposing this one. To our knowledge, only one film depicted the issue: ‘The Cove’ (Louie Psihoyos, 2009). However, as organizers, we wanted another film which could talk about why the hunting is still happening. After doing some research, we found ‘Behind The Cove’ (Keiko Yagi, 2015) – the first film made in response to ‘The Cove’. We screened both movies and had invited representatives of the two movies: Keiko Yagi (Behind The Cove film director) and Tim Burns (Cove monitor representative, The Dolphin Project) who was present over Skype from Florida, as well as Dr. Fumitaka Wakamatsu (Research administrator, Kyoto University) who did his PhD in Anthropology at Harvard University on the “Making of scientific whaling in Japan: ecology, science and cultural nationalism”. The session was bilingual (English/Japanese) and Mrs Keiko Yagi had an interpreter: Yoshiko Kashimoto.



After the screening of both movies and before the discussion, Mi-Yeon Kim (D1/L3 from Kyoto University Wildlife Research Center, PWS student, and member of Conserv'Session) who studies dolphin communication in Jeju island, South Korea gave a short presentation on cetacean cognition and numbers related to Japanese whaling – facts that were missing from both movies. She started by introducing the Encephalization Quotient (EQ) – an estimate of relative intelligence, in different cetacean and primate species, showing that EQ is significantly higher in white-sided dolphins, common dolphins, rough-toothed dolphins and modern humans compared to orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees and orcas. Then, after adding more scientific facts on cetacean cognition, the audience learnt how many whales were killed (595), captured to be sent to aquariums (232) – each dolphin is sold for up to 150,000 USD (in Jan. 2017, two bottlenose dolphins were sold to Ulsan aquarium in South Korea for 180,000 USD), and released after initial captures (377) in Taiji last year. The species concerned were Risso’s dolphins, striped dolphins and pilot whales for their meat; bottlenose dolphins, pantropical spotted dolphins, pacific

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white-sided dolphins and pilot whales for captivity; and their IUCN status was either “Least concern” or “Data deficient”. The killing techniques before and after ‘The Cove’ changed. To avoid the sea turning red, fishermen replaced spikes by a metal rod that they insert into the spinal cord just behind the blowhole causing paralysis before plugging the wound. Mi-Yeon also talked about several cases of released captive dolphins and their successful reproduction into the wild in Korea.



The audience for this session was unusual, large in number (80), mainly from the public and less from academia, mostly Japanese and older. A Kyoto-based newspaper (Kyodo News) advertised our event and had journalists attending the session, who also interviewed Keiko Yagi. We had men in black suits in the front row taking notes and I have no idea who they were.

Some of the striking points during discussion

The first question from the audience was about the use of chemical weapons by the U.S. military forces during the Vietnam War – an issue addressed in Keiko Yagi’s film while she found out that anti-whaling was put on the UN agenda by the U.S. back in 1972 as a potential strategy to end criticism about the Vietnam War (1955-1975). Another parallel was made between World War II and Japanese whaling, the latter having been initiated as a response to food shortage during that period. Someone else also asked Tim Burns what he thought about the atrocities of the Vietnam War, and he responded by condemning any atrocity made during any war. In my point of view, this is an example of misunderstanding about the whaling issue or a manner to divert attention again. Most of us belong to countries who (have) commit(ted) crimes against humanity, but it does not mean that we – civilians are supporting them nor that we will forget them. The issue discussed here aimed to focus on dolphin hunting in Taiji nowadays since this event was organized in Japan. We could have talked about many other countries beside the USA and Japan regarding the entertainment business since lots of captive dolphins around the world come from Taiji, but we did not. After the second screening, my feeling was as if a war was still going on between Japan and the USA and that the whaling issue was just a pretext to settle old scores. Inappropriate associations, misunderstandings and nationalism are braking the advancement of this debate.

Another person in the audience asked why there are less films about industrial farming than whaling, again pointing out what is wrong elsewhere instead of debating the issue. From an animal welfare point of view,

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industrial farming could be considered as bad as dolphin slaughtering but we will keep industrial farming for another session. That said, there are lots of documentaries about industrial farming which were made to raise awareness about animal welfare, deforestation, CO2 emissions and other issues since it is a global problem. There is also a good number of documentaries about whaling in general but as far as I know, only three on the Taiji issue (an additional film called “A whale of a tale” by Megumi Sasaki came out last year). Talking about potential alternatives for Taiji, someone else asked Keiko Yagi whether whale watching could be one. Her answer was that it would not be good for animal welfare because of boat disturbance. Here, I think it was not a sound argument, as responsible whale/dolphin watching is not even comparable to the killing of the animals in terms of welfare.

A report by the Environmental Investigation Agency in 2013 already warned about the unsustainability of the dolphin drive hunt in Taiji. However, as it used to be the case for tuna, as long as a species is not ‘endangered’, the alarm does not ring and we keep fishing/hunting them until we reach the point of no return. On this line, we got a question for Tim Burns on whether he would change his position if whaling / dolphin hunting was sustainable. The response was “No. The Dolphin Project is dedicated to the welfare of dolphins around the world and what is happening in Taiji is against it”.

The Cove harbors many hidden scenes and this was pointed out in Behind The Cove. The film crew used special effects to provoke emotions among the public, and they even disclosed false information, such as “Hideki Moronuki, Deputy of fisheries for Japan, was fired in 2008 (which has removed from the Japanese version of The Cove). Beside the last one, these are tricks that many documentaries use during the editing process to make a coherent story even if this dismissed some scenes or create them. Some films reveal those tricks, some do not and pretend that scenes have been made in one shot – with a well edited documentary, people would never wonder. This is a matter of point of view.

Before this session, I went to Nagoya Port Aquarium with a friend who recently arrived in Japan. I wanted to find out by myself where the dolphins there came from. I asked one of the dolphin trainer in Japanese where their group of 5 bottlenose dolphins comes from and the response was straight forward: “Wakayama” (prefecture) and when I insisted whether they came from captivity, the response was “Sea”. Putting wild animals in captivity and killing them might happen at the same time and ultimately serve the enjoyment of people either by entertaining them or by feeding them, but dolphin captures and whaling could also be seen as serving two different goals. The Cove focused on the dolphin drive hunt happening in Taiji, Behind The Cove chose to talk about whaling in a broader sense. As such, I think we could even have separated the discussion into two different topics: dolphin drive hunt and whaling as people may have different opinions on the two.



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Challenges

This session was quite long and included lots of components so, we did not miss to experience some logistical difficulties with e.g. Skype working before the session but no sound while in session. We did not expect to have that many Japanese speaker only in the audience and therefore, had to improvise English to Japanese translation as well as Japanese to English (for which we had invited an interpreter) for the invited speakers and the questions from the audience. So, even though we had planned on a 5-hour session (2-7 pm), it took two more hours and we still had raised hands when we had to close the session at 9 pm.

Feedback

“After watching *The Cove*, I was excited to see how those who are for killing whales would object the movie. To be honest, I was nonetheless disappointed because *Behind The Cove* was biased toward historical matter and the discussion at the end was in line with this. However, it should be noticed that watching two movies made from two sides was a good opportunity, because after the session, I talked about whaling with several friends.”

Yuri Kawaguchi, Master student, Kyoto University Primate Research Institute

“In my opinion both movies have strong and weak points. As a biologist, with conservation and animal welfare as main topics of research, my view did not change by either movies but watching these two-sided versions made me realize how much discussion on the subject is still needed. However, I would like to have seen in the second movie, more on the captive industry for which many of the hunted dolphins are captured for. It is urgent to include in the discussion all parts involved, including the local communities, Japanese authority representatives and international committees for Animal welfare and Wildlife Conservation, as this practice is deeply ingrained in the human population behaviour but affects in the worst possible way the lives of sentient wild animals, who belongs to no people. In sum, we should set aside old differences in order to preserve these species for future generations.”

Raquel Costa, PhD student, Kyoto University Primate Research Institute

For more feedback on this session, please see other reports from students in June 2017:

<http://www.wildlife-science.org/en/reports.html>

6. Others

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank PWS for its continuous support; our invited speakers: Ms Keiko Yagi, Mr Tim Burns and Dr. Fumitaka Wakamatsu for their time and will to discuss the topic; Miku Akiyama, Yoko Sakai and Yoshiko Kashimoto for their help; as well as the audience for coming in number and raising questions.