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Initiation of new environmental monitoring network project in Okinawa, Japan

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Abstract

A new environmental monitoring and networking project, named Okinawa Environmental Observation Network (OKEON) Chura-mori Project, is currently being established on Okinawa Island. Okinawa is a subtropical island surrounded by coral reef, and its marine environment is relatively well-studied; however, environmental and biodiversity studies are lacking for most of its terrestrial habitats except for Yanbaru, a forested area in the northern part of the island.

Since April 2015 we established eight study-sites containing 24 SLAM traps, and the full number of sites will be expanded to 24 with 72 traps across different habitats on Okinawa Island by the end of FY2015. Each individual study-site is defined as a circle with a 100 m diameter and contains insect traps and a weather station. The diversity of winged ants is monitored in two-week intervals and samples will be sorted and dry-mounted. We expect the collection of Okinawan ants to grow rapidly and to represent the actual (alate) ant fauna within short time. Samples of each species will also be DNA-sequenced and used to create a comprehensive phenology.

Another very important aspect of OKEON Project is the establishment of social networks and collaborations between different institutions and the public, i.e. OIST, Okinawan government agencies, the University of Ryukyus, several local museums, high schools, and other interested individuals. Ant research programmes have already been started at four different high schools under the instruction of the OKEON Project.

Key words: island biodiversity, winged ants, ant phenology

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