Biodiversity and Biogeography of the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin

Preface

The eastern part of the Eurasian Continent was escaped from the covering by a vast ice sheet at the glacial age. Many boreal and arctic-alpine species could survive and freely migrate southward along the Kurils and/or Sakhalin to the Japanese Archipelago. Thus, both the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin worked as the corridors for the migration of these species in the northeastern Asia during the Quarternary period. Detailed clarification on the historical change of flora and fauna in the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin provide a fascinating subject for all the scientists who get an interest in the biodiversity and biogeography of the northeastern Asia.

Since the Kurils and Sakhalin are located in the vicinity of the boundary between Japan and Russia, many political troubles have occurred in the two regions. Some troubles or disagreements are also found in the natural sciences. For example, Japanese and Russian taxonomists often have different opinions on the demarcations between the species and the selection of valid scientific names in many boreal taxa of the Kurils and Sakhalin. It constitutes a significant obstacle to the progress of science of the two countries. International scientific project will help us resolve this taxonomic and nomeclatural problems.

The International Kuril Island Project (IKIP) was carried out under a joint collaboration of Japanese, Russian and American researchers from 1994 to 2000 (totaling 77 individuals for all seven years combined). Flora and fauna of all major islands of the Kuril Islands have been investigated by these IKIPers (see http://artedi.fish.washington.edu/okhotskia/ikip/index.htm). Fifty-six papers in total were presented at the International Symposium on Kuril Island Biodiversity held at Sapporo Campus, Hokkaido University, Japan from May 18 to 22, 2001. Their sources of several papers which are published in this issue are traced at the symposium. Following the joint scientific expedition into the Kurils, some biologists have conducted successive expeditions into Sakhalin since 2001. All these expeditions and symposium have been supported by U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF)*, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS)**, and the Far Eastern Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences (FEB RAS)***. We would like to express our deepest appreciation to many research participants and the financial supports from several sources of Japan, Russia and U.S.A.

Actually we devoted considerable efforts to the field studies in the Kurils and Sakhalin during almost ten years. Biological specimens collected in the expeditions are mainly deposited in Hokkaido University (Japan), the Institute of Biology and Soil Sciences of the Far Eastern Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences (Russia), and the University of Washington (USA). We have acquired considerable information about the biodiversity and biogeography of the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin. Papers revealed in this issue are mainly based on a comprehensive collection and large experience of the Kuril Archipelago and Sakhalin since 1994.

This issue may be the first volume of a series of "Biodiversity and Biogeography of the Kuril Islands and Sakhalin"; it includes eight botanical, entomological and archaeological papers. Additional scientific papers are prepared at various stages and next issue of the same title will also contain the papers on various fields of endeavor.

This issue is published as the second number of the Bulletin of the Hokkaido University Museum. We wish to express our sincere thanks to those who have contributed manuscripts, for their cooperation in producing the final papers and responding to editors' comments.

Hideki Takahashi and Masahiro Ôhara
The Hokkaido University Museum
Sapporo, Japan

*: The Biological Sciences Directorate (Biotic Surveys and Inventories Program) and the International Program Division of the U.S. National Science Foundation, grant numbers DEB-9400821, DEB-9505031, T.W. Pietsch, principal investigator

**: The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, grant number BSAR-401, K. Amaoka, principal investigator.
The work in Sakhalin was supported in part by a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) from Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, No. 13575008 to H. Takahashi.

***: The Russian Federal Science and Technology Program for "Biological Diversity", state contract number 504-1(00)- П , Viktor V. Bogatov, principal investigator.