

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: Evolution of Ecology and Infectious Disease conference .

Travel Dates: 19/6/11– 21/6/11

Location: University of California, Santa Barbara

Group Member(s): Karen Fairlie-Clarke.....

Aims: To present a poster “ Who goes there? How antigen dose informs the immune response during co-infection.”

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OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The Ecology and Evolution of Infectious Diseases (EEID) is an annual conference held in the United States and I am grateful that the James Rennie Bequest was able to award funds to facilitate my attendance. This year it was to be held in Santa Barbara much to the delight of any overseas participants who were unaware of the local microclimate known as the ‘June Gloom’, which sees the Santa Barbara coastline shrouded in mists and the temperature hovering around 15°C. A home away from home for this Scottish attendee!

Unlike the weather, the conference itself was far from disappointing with a diverse program of 19 speakers from various disciplines spread over the 2 days. In addition to the scheduled talks there were 2 poster sessions that were well attended and gave me the opportunity to discuss my current research with a number of highly esteemed scientists. My poster design encapsulated both the immunological aspect of my research and how I feel this relates to evolutionary and ecological theory and I was pleased with how my ideas were received. The feedback and discussion centred round my poster was particularly valuable as preparation for my PhD viva examination that was scheduled for the week after my return to the UK.

Whilst the size of this conference has increased quite dramatically over the past few years, testament to the growing community interested in this field of research, the organisers work hard to maintain an informal atmosphere, with the emphasis on discussion. The friendly nature of this conference often saw the discussions spill over to the more convivial setting of the local bars. The fact that there were only 3 of these establishments to choose from meant that everyone descended en masse, which (if you weren’t the lone barman) was great as it facilitated introductions. One of the greatest strengths of the EEID is bringing together researchers from multiple disciplines, I enjoyed talking to a number of post-docs and professors and was pleased that I was able to offer insights or suggestions for incorporating immunology to their research, which will hopefully lead to future collaborations.

The morning after the conference concluded there was an organised walk along the coastline providing a great opportunity to appreciate the local landscape and wildlife. This activity is also a really important part of the meeting; a major aim of the EEID organisers is to give students and post-docs an opportunity to build relations that will help form the future research community and this social event gives a real cohesion to the group of participants. I benefited enormously from attending this meeting from the perspective of discussing my own research but also in terms of shaping my future career decisions.