

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: 8th Indo Pacific Fish Conference and 2009 Australian Society of Fish Biology Workshop and Conference.....

Travel Dates: Conference dates: 1st-5th June, travel dates: 23rd May – 15th June

Location: Fremantle, Perth, Australia.....

Group Member(s): Adel Heenan

Aims:

- 1) to attend the conference and present a talk entitled “Restoring depleted coral reef fish populations through recruitment enhancement: a proof of concept”.
- 2) to spend time with Dr Mark Meekan, a collaborator at the Australian Institute of Marine Science.
- 3) to assist in the data collection for a project co-ordinated by my supervisor, Dr Stephen Simpson.
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OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

I was able to travel to Western Australia after receiving a generous award from the James Rennie Bequest. The main purpose of the trip was to attend the 8th Indo Pacific Fish conference which was held at the start of June in Fremantle, Perth. The timing and location was fortunate, as I was also able to visit Dr Mark Meekan, who had recently moved to the Perth office of the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS). In addition, both before and after the conference, I had the great opportunity of spending time in the water collecting data for a longitudinal study organized by my supervisor, Dr Stephen Simpson.

Steve and I arrived in Perth one week before the conference began. We spent this time organizing the logistics of the upcoming field trip and preparing our talks for the following week. The weekend before the conference started, we took the ferry to Rottnest Island, for a short stint in the field. On the reefs around the island we took samples of the Western Gregory *Stegastes obreptus*, a fish whose population stretches from the cool temperate reefs around Perth right up beyond the warmer tropical reefs in the Dampier Archipelago. This natural latitudinal gradient in water temperature was the focus of a study that Steve and Mark carried out ten years previously. They collected fish from regions along this gradient to investigate the effect of temperature on the growth and life history parameters of this fish. Since then, all regions along this coast have undergone an increase in sea surface temperature, so to follow on from the original study and to investigate the effect of climate change induced temperature shifts, we revisited the sites to collect more specimens. Rottnest is a nature reserve, managed by the Rottnest Island Authority. There are only a handful of cars allowed and most people either walk or get about by bike. The white sand beaches are stunning and empty, and the quokkas plentiful. These are the island’s namesake, a pocket sized marsupial that was mistaken for a rat or “Rott” by the first colonial settlers.

After three successful days we had to return to the mainland for the conference. I was pleased to see so many familiar faces at the Welcome reception, this was a rare chance to meet up with some good friends I have made in the field. Every day there were two plenary sessions, one in the morning and one in the evening. It was exciting to hear these and to learn about the cutting edge research that is being done, particularly as

many of the plenarys were delivered by scientists whose work I have referred to frequently through my Ph.D. Luckily, my talk was scheduled for the second day. Although I was nervous speaking to such a large audience, it went well and I was asked plenty of questions afterwards. Having got that out of the way early on in the week, I was then able to enjoy the rest of the conference. I spent most of my time in the *Larval behaviour and processes affecting larval recruitment* and the *Ecology of reef fish* sessions. Many of the talks in these sessions were of high relevance to my research.

In keeping with the Australian stereotype, the atmosphere was laid back and friendly. This made it very easy to approach people during the coffee and lunch breaks and the conversation got more animated when at the end of the day, we tended to move across the road to the Little Creatures brewery. I think I may have gained as much from these informal mingle-lings as I did from the actual talks. Of particular note was a discussion I had with Dr Mark McCormick about one of the results I had presented in my talk. This prompted me to revisit the data upon my return to Edinburgh, and as a result I now have some interesting new patterns.

At the end of the week, we traveled 1500 km north to Ningaloo reef to continue the collection of samples for the longitudinal study. We hired a camper van to use as a mobile laboratory and worked our way up coast, avoiding the numerous death-wish kangaroos that liked to hop off the red dust into the middle of the road. In addition to catching lots of fish samples, I also caught a glimpse of a whale shark and amazingly two humpback whales while underwater.

Steve and I broke the return journey with a short stopover in Singapore, where he gave a lecture at the biology department of the National University and I was able to spend a very valuable couple of hours in their bioacoustics workshop, getting some equipment fixed out before embarking on another fieldtrip.

I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest for the award that allowed me to have such an incredible experience. I have returned to my desk with inspiration from the conference and motivation to finish my thesis and built on the ideas and contacts I made during this trip.