

# JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

## REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/Conference Title: 15<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Comparative Cognition (CO3)** .....

**Travel Dates: 18<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2008**.....

**Location: Melbourne Beach, Florida, USA** .....

**Group Member(s): Laura Kelley**.....

**Aims:** To present my poster entitled ‘Vocal mimicry in bowerbirds’ and to attend a wide range of talks concerning the field of cognition. ....

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### OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The International Conference on Comparative Cognition (CO3) is the first international conference I have attended. As it was in Florida there were many American delegates than I had not met at previous conferences based in the UK. The conference itself had a slightly unusual format, with talks being restricted to 5 minutes each, with 2 minutes for questions and discussion. This gave a nice snapshot of one aspect of each speaker’s research, and meant that wide ranges of subjects were covered each day. Talks were of an excellent quality, and I found many of them very interesting. They covered many aspects of cognition, including spatial cognition, social learning, perception and attention. There was also a mix of lab and field based studies, illustrating the variety of ways in which different areas of cognition can be addressed. I was particularly interested in the talks concerning communication, song learning and auditory discrimination, and talked to the speakers afterwards about their research.

There was also an afternoon of talks honouring the contributions of Sara Shettleworth to the field of comparative cognition. Several leading researchers in the field gave excellent plenary talks about their areas of research, covering diverse subjects such as ant navigation and memory systems. Sara Shettleworth gave a 90-minute talk discussing changes and advances in the field of comparative cognition. She highlighted particular areas where progress is being made, and illustrated how interdisciplinary research should be integrated into cognitive studies more often. In the evening there was a banquet where discussions regarding Sara’s talk were continued, with Sara herself adding to the discussion as she was on my table. It was particularly pleasant to discuss the talks with speakers in a less formal atmosphere, where we could discuss their research in more depth than was allowed by the short talks. I also stayed in the hotel where the conference was being held, which allowed me to use meal breaks and tea and coffee breaks to discuss work further with others.

Due to the number of attendees, two poster sessions were run, which allowed me to talk to other PhD students about their work. My poster session was very fruitful as I spoke to several leaders in my field who provided valuable feedback about my work. During discussions about my poster I also had a very useful discussion with Dr Laurie Bloomfield, who gave me invaluable advice about areas of analysis I had problems with, and who will be a useful contact in the future. I found it very useful to talk people through my work, and found my confidence increased after talking through my poster several times.

Overall, this conference was incredibly helpful to me, both in terms of discussing my research with others in the field and in terms of increasing my confidence and motivation. As many of the topics covered were outside my area of specific research, I found the conference very useful for generating ideas about potential areas of future work that I hadn’t previously considered. I am very grateful to the James Rennie Bequest for funding my travel and allowing me to attend this excellent conference.