

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: International Ethological Conference.....

Travel Dates: 19th – 24th August 2009

Location: Rennes, France

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

Aims: To present a poster entitled “Vocal mimicry: who learns from whom?” and to discuss my PhD work with researchers in similar areas.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

The International Ethological Conference (IEC) is held every two years, and the theme for 2009 was integrating approaches to ethology based on Tinbergen’s four questions. This year’s conference was held in Rennes, a pretty French town in Brittany. Approximately 700 delegates attended the conference, which consisted of 12 plenary lectures, 36 oral sessions, 22 symposia and over 100 posters. The talks covered a wide variety of topics and study species, with each day focused on a particular area of ethology.

Although I predominantly attended talks relevant to my area of research, I also attended some excellent presentations about subjects as diverse as cuttlefish camouflage and how to model termite tunnel networks. Although there was only one talk specifically concerning vocal mimicry in birds, I found many of the talks concerning song learning and behaviour helped me think about my research in a wider framework.

I had some very interesting and informative discussions concerning my poster, particularly with Rod Suthers who is the only scientist to date who has investigated mechanistic aspects of vocal mimicry. Clive Catchpole from UCL also had some valuable comments, especially concerning interpretation of my results and a manuscript related to these. I also had a very useful meeting with Professor Adrian Craig from Rhodes University, who was keen to discuss the findings of one of his students. We both found the discussion fruitful, discussing future projects for his students, and we may collaborate further on these. There were also some very interesting posters at the conference. I had a discussion with one poster presenter who researches mimicry in the Australian pied butcherbird, and found that my results complemented the findings of her work. I also read an interesting poster concerning bowerbirds and fires, and how they may adapt their bower construction to avoid damage from bush fires.

The conference was also a great opportunity to catch up with friends from previous conferences, and to make new acquaintances. The conference dinner was excellent, and it was refreshing to socialise with delegates in a less formal environment. The long lunch breaks also encouraged people to mix and socialise, and I had several interesting conversations with people I had not previously met.

Overall, this was a very useful conference that gave me a great opportunity to meet researchers in my field, many of whom are based in Australia and America so I had not had the opportunity to meet them before. I am very grateful to the James Rennie Bequest for allowing me to attend this conference, which has helped me develop ideas for my thesis and has been of great benefit to me in general.