

'Eriskay'  
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Four weeks of my summer were spent in the Tropics, an area of the world I had never previously visited. During that time I was in Honduras, a Central American country of great diversity in both a cultural and biological sense. I mention biology for that was the purpose of my expedition; 4 weeks on a wildlife conservation project with the academic and charitable organisation 'Operation Wallacea'.

The month was spent in two very contrasting environments where I helped teams of research scientists gather primary data on the diverse fauna which inhabit these humid parts. For the first 2 weeks I stayed in Cusuco National Park, an area in the Merendon mountains neighbouring the north westerly city of San Pedro Sula. The first week comprised of a series of lectures and practicals, teaching us about the neotropical forest ecology and respective techniques applied for researching and conserving different jungle-dwelling animals. These techniques were then implemented during the second week where I aided scientists gathering primary data for their research. The bird teams carried out mistnetting and weighing and measuring, and similarly with the bat teams at night. Also during nightfall were some herpetofauna walks, where timed searches along different transects were undertaken in a search for amphibians and reptiles. The second week in Cusuco was at a camp of lower elevation and, therefore much higher humidity, of the Base Camp in week one. Thus there was a difference in the flora and fauna, and also the physical demands imposed upon us on transects! However the 2 weeks I spent in the jungle were truly fantastic; never will you experience an environment so strikingly contrast to often dreich Scotland. A vast lush green canopy overhead with the clacks of cicadas ringing is an alarm call like no other, with the day beginning from the view of a tent perched on a muddy mountainside. Accommodation was basic, but if anything this widened my eyes to our granted luxuries; the springy bed in my student flat which used to be the subject of many a grumble promptly became a yearning when a skin-thin roll mat didn't cut it. Needless to say, it is simply incredible how a mere 14 days in one's lifetime has the power to influence and shape the future career line I now want to go into. Without this experience, never would I have been exposed to the possibilities of on-going scientific research in this relatively untouched corner of the world.

The following two weeks I spent on Cayo Menor, a tiny island in the Caribbean Sea part of the Cayos Cochinos (Hog Islands) chain. After learning to scuba dive here, I learnt about the coral reefs and how scientists are researching them. We were instructed on the techniques used in underwater benthic transects, their strengths and weaknesses and why it is important that research is being done on the Caribbean coral reefs in response to climate change. Having barely snorkelled, diving in Honduran tropical waters and seeing the sheer diverse range of corals, sponges, invertebrates, fish and crustaceans right up close was truly awesome. Being fairly naïve to the methods of studying the marine world, this experience truly broadened my knowledge of marine biology, and heightened my awareness of the importance of its study regarding current global warming. We were lectured on the variety of species common in these parts, and how problems can arise when trying to manage protected areas. Such problems include lack of local knowledge regarding the sensitivity coral reefs have to perturbations. Scientists talked to us about problems they had encountered when

undertaking work and to me, this heightened the importance of overcoming cultural differences with regard to our view on nature and how we are to manage it well. The research of OpWall scientists provides a solid scientific background from which information can be used to make decisions regarding the appropriate conservation measures which will sustainably maintain the ecosystem in the face of both climatic change, and human pressures like overfishing.

The 4 weeks I spent in Honduras, in two very different ecosystems, have been the topic of great excited interest to my family and friends, nearly all of whom had never ventured to those parts. I took great pleasure in telling the stories of my voluntary work there for it gave me the chance to reflect on all that had been learned, and discuss the differences in culture. I feel honoured to have been given the opportunity, not only to simply observe and experience the natural beauty of Honduras, but more so to be involved in the work of the fantastic organisation that is Operation Wallacea. This expedition would most likely not have manifested itself had it not been for the funding I received from the James Rennie Bequest. The great generosity of the James Rennie Bequest made a substantial difference to me. Without the funding received, never would I have witnessed, experienced and learnt techniques used in tropical scientific research/conservation. Never would I have been able to trek through lush tropical jungle, or dive in the Caribbean. Moreover, never would my eyes be opened to the extensive cross cultural possibilities science can offer. For that, I thank you sincerely for everything you have enabled me to experience, achieve and learn.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Munro". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Karen Munro.