

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/
Conference Title:** Operation Wallacea Honduras Expedition – 2 weeks terrestrial and 2
weeks marine

Travel Dates: 22th June – 19th July 2022

Location: Cusuco National Park; Utila, Honduras

Group member(s): Irena Atanasova

Aims: To contribute to the conservation and monitoring of endemic species
in the neotropics

To experience first hand what is to be a real scientist

Photography consent form attached: Yes
(please refer to your award letter) No

OUTCOME (a minimum of 500 words):-

Spending almost one month in Honduras was one of the greatest adventures in my life. During the first half of my expedition I was in Cusuco National Park (CNA), right at the heart of a cloud forest. In those exciting 2 weeks I got to spend in this astonishingly diverse place, I had the chance to contribute to the conservation of a number of species endemic to CNA, including *Bolitoglossa diaphora*, *Oedipina tomasi*, *Plectrohyla dasypus*, *Plectrohyla exquisita*, *Geophis nephodrymus* and many others. Since Honduras is one of the hilliest counties in Central America, in the first week we had jungle training to prepare us for the steep terrain. After the jungle training, we had lectures to introduce us to the ecology of Cusuco National Park, the sampling techniques that were used at the site, and how the biodiversity patterns had changed over time.

Following my passion for amphibians and reptiles, I mostly helped out in herpetological surveys. On those surveys we were catching, measuring and often marking any snakes, lizards, frogs and salamanders we found. We would measure weight, snout to vent length (SVL), and tail length. By the end of the second week I was comfortably identifying any herp species we encountered, assisting in taking measures and filling the database; I even got

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asked to return as a staff member next year which would be an exceptional opportunity for my academic career.

During my time in the jungle I also participated in assessing habitat quality with the aim of linking the species we found along a particular transect with the type of vegetation it supports. Thus, we would get an idea of species specific habitat preferences. Not only that, but I also completed a Cloud Forest Canopy Access Course, during which we encountered of *Celestus montanus* at about 50 meters high up in the canopy. The adults of this species spend almost no time at ground level. Due to the ecology of this species, it remains largely understudied. Another interesting observation was a *Stenorhina freminvillii* individual, which has not been previously recorded for Cusuco National Park, suggesting expansion of their range higher up probably due to increasing temperatures.

The rest of my expedition I spent in Utila, which is one of the three Bay Islands in Honduras. I was there for another 2 weeks in which I got to truly experience the Honduran culture. In the first week, I got certified as an Open Water Diver. Then, during second week, we took an Ecology Course consisting of 2 daily lectures. There, we learned about the local marine biodiversity, current conservation efforts to protect the reef and any ongoing research at the site. As I was there for only 2 weeks I did not get the chance to participate in any of the actual projects that were running. Nevertheless, I feel I have developed useful skills that would allow me to conduct marine research in the future if the opportunity arises.

Last but not least, by joining this expedition I had the chance to meet so many incredible people – staff members, other students, and local guides, who enriched me enormously and will always be in my heart.