

My time with Operation Wallacea provided an interesting introduction to an extremely diverse ecosystem; it did not, however, give me the in-depth knowledge that I had hoped for. As a general volunteer, my level of involvement and usefulness varied greatly between the different projects: the macaque project in particular required a level of experience in zoology that I do not have (I am studying genetics), and in my opinion should only have allowed dissertation students to join. It was also fairly obvious that some of the academic staff did not take their general volunteers very seriously (again, this applied mainly to the macaque project). While it is understandable that any scientist would want to make the most of the most of the limited time available for research and therefore spend more time with their dissertation students, Operation Wallacea's promotional material did not make this bias clear: essentially their general volunteers were treated as 'ecotourists', and little attempt was made to formally teach us about the projects beyond a weekly series of lectures given by the project organisers. I would not recommend that you continue to fund students intending to join Operation Wallacea as general volunteers, unless it is obvious that they have some kind of previous experience or knowledge of the type of project they have applied to join. It would be possible for a student to learn much more at less expense by joining a project in which all volunteers have the same level of experience, and there is no reason for the project leader to treat them differently.

Although Operation Wallacea is not ideal for general volunteers, the support and expertise they provide to dissertation students is largely very good. Because they employ a good staff of academics from a range of disciplines, a large number of different projects can be undertaken. It is also a good opportunity for honours students to carry out a project outside the UK: the requirement of all universities that any honours project must be supervised by a suitably qualified academic is satisfied by the Operation Wallacea staff. The lab facilities available in their rainforest base are also very good, and include a well-equipped computer room. I would strongly recommend that you consider any applications for funding by honours or masters students intending to carry out specific research projects.

This report applies only to Operation Wallacea's research at the Labundo bundo field centre on Buton island: they run projects at a number of other sites around Buton, and have just set up a research station in Cuba which will take its first group of volunteers next summer. On the whole their work is done very efficiently, and their non-scientific staff are as good as would be expected from any well-established travel organisation. Once again I would like to thank the Davis Fund committee for supporting my trip so generously: although it did not go exactly to plan, it was an unforgettable month which would not have been possible without your help.