

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title:

11th Congress of the European Society for Evolutionary Biology and WAMBAM II Workshop

Travel Dates: 20 -30 August 2007

Location: Uppsala and Gotland, Sweden

Group Member(s): Thomas Reed

Aims: To travel to an international conference entitled “11th Congress of the European Society for Evolutionary Biology” which took place from 20 – 25 August 2007. This meeting is a key event on the diary of any European student of evolutionary biology and was attended by some 1200 delegates. I gave a presentation at one of the 30 symposia, entitled “Ageing and senescence in wild animal populations”. Following this conference, I attended a small workshop geared specifically for researchers interested in quantitative genetics of wild animal populations, which was held on the island of Gotland, Sweden.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

With financial support from the James Rennie Bequest I was able to attend the biannual ESEB conference at Uppsala and a quantitative genetics workshop on Gotland, Sweden, last August. The ESEB congress was attended by some 1200 delegates and comprised 30 symposia, covering a diversity of topics within the field of evolutionary biology. This was a fantastic opportunity for me to be exposed, first-hand, to the most recent, cutting edge research coming out of the best evolutionary labs across Europe and beyond. It also came at an opportune time: I am nearing the end of my PhD and at this critical stage it is crucial for me to network with fellow scientists in the same field. What better way to get myself out there and immersed in the latest science than to attend this large-scale conference, where there was ample opportunity for networking, one-on-one chats and socialising with potential future employers! I was also lucky enough to get the chance to present my own work at this event – I gave a talk in the ‘Ageing and Senescence in Wild Animal Populations’ symposium. I study the ecological and evolutionary basis of ageing patterns in wild seabird populations, and so this symposium was the perfect forum for me to present my results and get feedback from other researchers with similar interests. Many big names were in the audience for this talk, several of whom I got to chat with after the symposium and in the bar that evening.

Immediately after attending the conference at Uppsala, I travelled to the Swedish island of Gotland, in the Baltic Sea, for a workshop on quantitative genetics. Following the hectic and fatiguing schedule of the previous week’s conference in Uppsala, this much smaller, informal workshop was a welcome change of scene. Entitled WAMBAM (which stands for ‘Wild Animal Model Biannual Meeting’), the workshop was attended by 30 odd researchers, from PhD to professor level, united by their common interests in the evolutionary genetics of pedigreed wild animal populations. Broadly speaking, the meeting aimed to present an overview of current issues, to stimulate discussion and to encourage collaboration. More specifically, there was much focus on the more challenging technical aspects (read horrible statistical models) facing researchers in this field, and I learnt much from the lengthy (and heated) discussions amongst the attendees. As I hope to continue in this particular field, the workshop was useful indeed for meeting the key players, discussing important issues and disseminating my own research.

I am extremely grateful to the James Rennie Bequest Committee and the School of Biological Sciences of the University of Edinburgh for providing me with financial assistance, without which I would have been unable to attend these great conferences.