

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION/PROJECT/CONFERENCE

**Expedition/Project/
Conference Title:** “Evolutionary Biology of *Caenorhabditis* and Other Nematodes”

Travel Dates: 30/03/2016 – 04/04/2016

Location: Cold Spring Harbor Laboratories, New York, USA

Group member(s): Lewis Stevens (Blaxter Lab)

Aims: Presentation of PhD research in the form of a talk

Discuss PhD project with international collaborators

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

In March 2016, I was awarded the James Rennie Bequest Travel Award to travel to Cold Spring Harbor Labs, New York, to attend the “Evolutionary Biology of *Caenorhabditis* and other nematodes” conference. There, I gave a talk on my research to an audience of around 100 researchers.

As a first year PhD student (and as this was my first international conference), I was incredibly fortunate to be selected to present my research. My PhD project involves coordinating the generation of genomic data for over 40 species of *Caenorhabditis* and disseminating this data to the *Caenorhabditis* research community, many of whom were in attendance at this conference.

Being able to provide an update on our project to the community and, more importantly, to meet our collaborators has been hugely beneficial. The talk itself provided me with a huge boost of confidence and taught me a lot about how to present my research in an effective way. I am currently collaborating with two research groups as a direct result of conversations I had at this conference, one of which has already resulted in a publication.

My talk aside, the conference itself was very enjoyable. The talks and posters focused on all aspects of nematode evolution, including their genomes, development, morphology and their molecular and cell biology. It was wonderful to see the range of techniques, approaches and ideas employed by this research community to understand nematode evolution. A particular highlight was hearing from Barbara Meyer, a hugely influential scientist in this field and in biology generally. The venue, Cold Spring Harbor Labs, has a long history as one of the world’s leading research institutes in molecular biology and genetics and has hosted 8 Nobel Prize winning scientists. It was inspiring to spend time there. We also managed to squeeze in some time to take in the sights of New York - somewhere I’d never get the chance to visit on a PhD salary!

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I am extremely grateful to the James Rennie Bequest for making this experience possible. It has so far been the highlight of PhD and I continue to reap benefits from it. Our project has been selected for a 1.5 hour workshop session at the International *C. elegans* conference in June 2017 - and, after my time at Cold Spring Harbor, I now feel well equipped to deal with this new challenge.