

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/

Conference Title: 22nd International C. elegans conference

Travel Dates: 20th July 2019 - 24th July 2019

Location: Los Angeles, California

Group member(s): Lewis Stevens

Aims: Presenting a talk on my PhD work

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

OUTCOME (a minimum of 500 words):-

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The James Rennie Bequest funded my travel to the '22nd International *C. elegans* conference', which was held at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) over four days in July 2019. The conference hosted researchers from around the world who use the nematode *Caenorhabditis elegans* in their research. The research presented at this conference spanned all major fields of biology, including cell biology, developmental biology, neurobiology, and evolution.

I had the great privilege of being selected to give a plenary talk about my PhD research on the *Caenorhabditis* Genomes Project. On the second day of the conference, I followed Bob Waterston (who was a pioneer in the Human Genome Project) to give a 12-minute talk to over 1,600 attendees. Despite being incredibly nervous, the talk went very well and I received lots of positive feedback. It provided the perfect opportunity to announce the completion of our project to the international *C. elegans* community, for whom this data will be incredibly useful in understanding the evolutionary origins of this important model organism. It was also a chance to give thanks and credit to all those who have been involved with this project over the years. As a direct result of this presentation and the discussions that followed, I am now collaborating with Luisa Coachella (Research Institute of Molecular Pathology) and her group to study the evolution of microRNAs across the genus *Caenorhabditis*.

My presentation aside, it was great to see the range of research being carried out using *C. elegans*, much of which is very different to what I study. Particular highlights include a talk by a member of my future lab group describing the results of deep sampling of natural *C. elegans* populations in Hawaii and one discussing the genomic consequences of reproductive mode between two closely related species of *Caenorhabditis*. These topics are directly relevant to my PhD research and the discussions that followed led to ideas for analyses that have since been included in my thesis. In addition, I am beginning a post-doctoral position with Erik Andersen at Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois, where I will continue to work on genetics of *Caenorhabditis* nematodes. I was able to meet up with my future colleagues in Erik's laboratory and discuss the various projects I will be involved in during my postdoc. I also had the chance to meet several of Erik's current and future collaborators. Building relationships with members of this community (which I plan to remain in for the foreseeable future) was perhaps the most important outcome of attending this conference.

After the conference finished, I spent three days hiking in the Californian mountains with collaborators from NYU and UCSD. While we did discuss science, this was mostly a time to relax after a busy conference. We've agreed to do the same after the next conference in two years time.

I'm immensely grateful to the James Rennie Bequest for supporting my travel to this conference, and for the generous support they have provided me with throughout my PhD.