

# JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

## REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

### Expedition/Project/

**Conference Title:** Operation Wallacea Croatia Expedition to Krka National Park and Silba Island

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**Travel Dates:** 11<sup>th</sup> June – 3<sup>rd</sup> August 2019

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**Location:** Croatia: Krka National Park and Silba Island

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**Group member(s):** Alice Wiersma

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**Aims:** The aim of this expedition was to learn more about conservation efforts around the world and develop my skills on various surveying techniques used by scientists and conservationists in the field.

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### OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

#### Research Assistant in Krka National Park and Silba Island, Croatia

Being a part of the expedition of Croatia was a very eye-opening experience for me. It gave me the opportunity to see what real field work would involve should I go into a career of scientific research. Before going I had preconceived ideas about what conservation work would be, and especially what I liked and wanted to learn more about. For example, I didn't realise how much I enjoyed working with birds and am now looking forward to learning to recognise more species from both appearance and calls. I never realised how important measurements are to identifying bird species, sex, and age.

While in Krka National Park, I did several surveys a day starting at various times of the day depending on what exactly we were looking for. During mammal surveys I was looking for scat, footprints, and video footage from camera traps as evidence of their presence. Unfortunately, our fish surveys weren't successful due to broken equipment, but I was able to do some rod fishing. The bat surveys I found very fascinating. We set up bat mist nets along the shore of a lake to catch bats feeding on the water's surface such as Daubenton's bat. The nets only caught one bat because the bats were learning where the nets were - I could clearly see the bats making sharp turns just before the net to avoid being caught. It was so interesting to see how intelligent such small mammals were and how fast they could learn. I also helped look for Hermann's tortoises out in the field and learned what measurements needed to be taken (37 in total for one animal!) to properly identify the individual should it be caught again.

On Silba Island, I was working on getting my PADI Open Water Diver qualification, which I succeeded in! Initially I wanted to do this diving course to see if it was something I liked doing. The idea of being reliant on just myself and diving buddy was quite scary for me and I wanted to prove to myself that I could conquer this fear. I am now able to dive to a maximum depth of 18m. It is also the first step to letting me work on more advanced diving qualifications. I think that I will continue diving in future and I hope to find a diving community in Edinburgh that can help me work on the skills I've developed. As I was working the whole time on getting my diving certification, I was unable to help with the sea grass, sea urchin, and noble pen shell surveys that the already qualified divers and snorkelers were doing. However, I think that now that I am certified I will be able to help out in future opportunities, especially now that I will have a better idea for what to look out for.

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At both sites, we had lectures focusing on the ecology of the region and the ongoing conservation practices. I found them very interesting, and while focusing mainly on Croatia, it was clear that one could extrapolate solutions to a global scale. On our final day in Krka we had a litter clean up, and I was shocked at the amount of plastic and rubbish we found. Even underwater in Silba, we always returned to the surface having picked up several plastic bags and items during our dive. Seeing our garbage reach such beautiful places was a harsh wake up call and has made me rethink what I consume on a day to day basis.

Thank you very much to the James Rennie Bequest for supporting me. It was a phenomenal experience and I am very grateful for the opportunity.