

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION / PROJECT / CONFERENCE

Expedition/Project/Conference Title: Animal Behavior Society Annual Conference (ABS 2024)
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Travel Dates: June 25th – 29th
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Location: University of Western Ontario, London, Canada
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Group member(s): Casey Patmore
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Aims:

- 1) To present my recent PhD research and receive feedback
- 2) To learn about the latest animal behaviour
- 3) To network and connect with international collaborators

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

OUTCOME (a minimum of 500 words):-

The Animal Behavior Society is one of the largest societies in the world focused on the study of animal behaviour. This year, their annual conference was held at the University of Western Ontario from June 25th – 29th. It attracts attendees from early-career researchers to renowned expert academics, and being able to attend is a tremendous opportunity.

The first day was made up of optional sessions, for which I attended a workshop titled “Data Past, Present, and Future”. This was particularly interesting to me as I near the end of my PhD, and have been considering best practice around interpreting, reproducing, and future-proofing behavioural data. Each following day, the conference had a full schedule of talks, plenary speakers, and afternoon events like the LGBTQ+ social, and a live recording of the Animal Behavior Podcast. Of the plenary speakers, I especially enjoyed the talk given by Dr Liana Zanette on “The Ecology of Fear”. Given my own research is rooted in behavioural responses to competition and adverse ecological conditions, I was fascinated by the similarities and ecological theory that related the two topics. As a result, I have since been considering this perspective on some of my own PhD work. In addition, I thought the Excellence in DEI Plenary given by Dr Damian Elias was excellent. In this talk, the themes of diversity in animal behaviour research, the animal behaviour community, and the ABS society were all linked around their research “shifting perspectives: context and diversity in spider mate choice”, and demonstrated the value of diversity in both generating interesting research questions, and supporting the people that work on them.

Each day many concurrent sessions hosted a variety of talks on animal behaviour research, covering topics like “social behaviour”, “cognition and learning”, and “behavioural plasticity”. I gave my own presentation in the “parental care” session, where I outlined the final chapter of my PhD, for which I have been exploring the role of overwhelming interspecific competition on parental investment in the burying beetle *Nicrophorus vespilloides*. Feedback from this session was valuable to me, as it highlighted the aspects of my study that may need to be better clarified in my thesis. On top of this, it also gave me a chance to consider my newfound understanding of the role of “fear” in this system, opening up a range of useful discussions, and further expanding my understanding on that topic.

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One of the best perks of attending this conference was my ability to meet, in-person, with an international community that I have been a member of for the last 4 years. Here, I had the chance to meet with collaborators and friends I have made during my work on the Animal Behavior Podcast for the first time, connect with labs that share my research interest, and enjoy several days of learning about some of the best up-and-coming research in my field.

I am tremendously grateful to the James Rennie Bequest for providing such generous support for me to attend this conference, as without their support I would simply not have had the funds to justify the expense of this international conference. Attending this conference has truly been a once-in-a-lifetime experience that has inspired a new line of thinking in my own research, and given me a unique and valuable opportunity for more some timely feedback on my research in the final months of my PhD.