

Guyana

Alex Harvey 2015 placement

For my 25 days of first year placement I chose to join Operation Wallacea as a research assistant within the rainforest of Guyana.

The reason the expedition being a perfect fit for my required placement, is because it involved surveying wildlife to assess the biodiversity found within a pristine rainforest, and comparing it to areas with reduced impact logging. There were seven biological and environmental surveys carried out, which consisted of bat mist nets, bird mist nets, herpetofauna transect counts, mammal transect counts including camera trapping, beetle traps, measuring forest structure and two river surveys.

After 24 hours of traveling the expedition commenced at the Iwokrama Research Centre with a series of lectures and training sessions. This allowed us time to acclimatize to the condition, meet the scientist and other assistants, as well as become accustomed to setting up surveys while being safe in the extreme environment of the rainforest. Over the three days of training we had talks from an array of highly trained individuals within of the field of wildlife conservation. It was a fascinating insight to hear first hand the experiences from the head rangers as well as the research methods carried out and what motivated the scientist joining us. After the induction and training we headed to a remote location within of the jungle called Turtle Mountain, this was the first of three locations for the land-based surveys.

Throughout the expedition we carried out the same methods of surveying, however we changed location in order to compare the biodiversity. I found my first year of studies at Bournemouth University in Ecology and Wildlife Conservation, had already given me the knowledge of how to carry out transects and helped with forest structure surveys, due to fieldwork at Studland beach. Where a lot of knowledge gained was transferable on my placement. Also the Physical Geography topic had taught me about El Nino, and other global weather patterns. This helped me to understand the unusually dry weather for the season and the effects; this was having not only upon the small villages dependent on the rivers, but also the wildlife of Guyana.

All of the surveys I have learnt throughout the expedition to Guyana I believe are essential knowledge for a career in conservation. All of the techniques can be applied in any environment to measure certain aspects of a species population. An employee within of the field of conservation with the knowledge of how to carry out these surveys on bird, bats, herpetofauna, insects and flora is a valuable asset. I believe that my placement has helped to equip me with a wider understanding of the work ethic and knowledge, which is needed to become a class-leading scientist within of a particular field. As well as an appreciation of the struggles and lack of opportunities, which can come with living with in of one of the poorest counties in the western hemisphere.

My role on the Expedition was a research assistant; this required me to assist in setting up and carrying out the surveys, working along side a scientist who specialized in the particular field such as mammals or birds. To carry out my role you had to be able to communicate well with in of a small team in order to pass on measured information of an animal such as wing length or plumage, but also more importantly to alert people of dangers such as Labaria (highly poisonous snake). You

were also required to stick to a schedule planned the previous day, which varied a lot from a 4am or 10am morning start and potentially a 12am finish. It was fascinating to hear and learn from the scientist joining us, they were unpaid on the expedition but the research they were carrying out was being used in their own studies and they were also gaining fieldwork experience just like we were. I learnt that many of their jobs were helping either museums or university in world leading research, while also helping Operation Wallacea and local logging companies find a sustainable way of using the materials of the rainforest.

Overall Going to such a remote location to carry out my placement was not only a thrill but also a new experience of a different culture and way of life.