

Work Placement Reflective Log (Guyana, South America 2015)

I decided to complete my 25 days of work placement abroad in Guyana, South America with a company known as Operation Wallacea.

I wanted to grasp the opportunity to go on a four week long expedition with Operation Wallacea to the Iwokrama Rainforest where I would gain life-long skills by performing bird, bat, mammals, invertebrate, herpetofauna, forest and river surveys all of which offer a phenomenal amount of knowledge, skills and development.

At the start of the work placement we had two jungle training days at the Iwokrama centre to allow us to be prepared for life in the rainforest and obtain the crucial skills required to be a research assistant which was our role on the expedition. The training days consisted of each head scientist undertaking a work shop of each survey we would be performing out in the rainforest. I felt this was a good opportunity to use my strengths of the knowledge I've already gained from carrying out similar surveys on my degree course such as a pit fall trap survey which are used for counting the abundance of invertebrate species, and apply them to the surveys we would be doing in the rainforest.

Each week of the work placement consisted of moving to a new location within of the Iwokrama rainforest. The first site we visited was Turtle mountain where we all got accustomed to how each day would work with the surveys. In the middle of the placement we went to kabukalli and Sandstone and then finished the placement by doing a two day river survey on the Burro Burro river. Each of these sites consisted of working non-stop every day of the week carrying out the relevant surveys. We would be put onto a rota and allocated into small groups where one day we would be doing bird surveys and the next day for example would include doing a mammal survey during the day and bat surveys at night. All of the surveys required us to be punctual as a typical survey day in the jungle would be a 5.00am start until 16.00pm in the afternoon. Each day it was crucial to complete each of the surveys as it provides vital data for the scientist and government on how each species is performing within of the Guyana shield, an area of safe haven for all fauna and flora species from the elements of destruction like logging. However, I found some of the elements of being a research assistant each week tougher then I had first anticipated. This was due to being in close proximity of the other research assistants so it was difficult to perform some of the surveys efficiently, whilst trying to be independent.

Along with having the privilege to work with professional scientist and the local guides , the thrill of the expedition never went. Being able to see other parts of the world and communities work together with the resources they have, keeping the natural beauty of the pristine rainforest and all of its inhabitants, untouched from destruction, was a real eye opener.

During the final week of the work placement in the Iwokrama Rainforest, it became clear that the skills and knowledge I had obtained over the last few weeks had allowed me to develop a future career path. Within of Guyana's rainforest it holds such a diverse array of species compared to places such as the United Kingdom. Learning from the local guides and scientist of how much knowledge they have on such a place with a vast amount of wildlife such as one scientist being a specialist of all the mammals, has captivated me into learning about species of special scientific interest in the United Kingdom. Therefore by

going on this expedition and carrying out the surveys, they have inspired me to tailor the rest of my remaining degree into this area of interest. I will be able to begin tailoring my future by grasping my next opportunity by staying in the UK for my next work placement and making vital contacts with organisations and employers.

To this present day I feel more prepared for future life after graduating from my degree by carrying out a work placement, then I did before. The placement in Guyana has allowed me to gain an insight knowledge of real hands on work out in the field and opened up more opportunities that I didn't know existed. By studying the Ecology and Wildlife Conservation degree it allowed me to be prepared with some crucial transferable skills for my work placement such as ecological survey skills. By the end of the placement even some of the more complex skills became more simplistic.