

Report to MASTS, October 2012

Summary of use of grant kindly received from MASTS Small Grants Award Scheme

The 14th International Behavioral Ecology Congress, Lund University, 12-18 August 2012

Following receipt of a small grant kindly provided by MASTS and bolstered by an additional grant from the International Society for Behavioral Ecology, I was able to attend and participate in the 14th International Behavioral Ecology Congress. The Congress was hosted by Lund University in Sweden from 12-18 August 2012. As one of the biggest meetings in the calendar for academics studying behavioural ecology across the world, I was thrilled to be accepted for a talk at my first 'big' conference. Behavioural ecology is, of course, a wide field encompassing a diversity of people, topics and study systems. The result was a really strong and diverse scientific program with, at any one time, six different sessions to choose from. While I was always keen to attend talks relevant to my main field of interest, I also took plenty of opportunities to listen to research in completely different fields. It was fascinating to be exposed to areas of behavioural ecology that I know little about and to widen my understanding and perspectives.

The Congress received a vast number of submissions for oral presentations and so I was thrilled to be accepted to give a talk. I delivered my presentation on the first day of the scientific program, as the first speaker in a session on environmental change. I presented some data from my PhD research on the effects of human disturbance on reproductive behaviour and physiology. The conference gave a lot of attention to environmental effects on behaviour and life histories, though there was still limited research concerning anthropogenic effects. Being my first presentation in such a distinguished and international forum, I was quite nervous, but delivered the talk clearly and confidently. My research was well received and I was delighted by the number of people who subsequently congratulated me on my talk and were interested to discuss it further. Stimulating discussions ensued with a number of people, who gave me new ideas as well as boosting my confidence in the quality of my work. For a PhD student, who has not had the time and experience to get to know many people in the field, the opportunity to give a talk at conferences like this is crucial. The exposure that one gets when stood before a large room of people working in related fields is fundamental to successful progression within a career in academic research.

While on the same latitude as Glasgow – my current home, Lund actually had some real summer weather to offer. Though, of course, not essential to a scientific meeting, the wall-to-wall sunshine and blue skies facilitated a relaxed and vibrant mood among participants, who could engage and socialise on the lawns outside the conference venue all day and evening. Surrounded by some of the oldest buildings of the University, which was founded in 1666 and is one of the top 100 universities in the world, it was an inspiring place to be for the 6 days of the conference. Besides attending many of the talks on offer, engaging and networking with others is a fundamental part of such meetings. For myself - as a student and having not previously attended such conferences before - it was a great opportunity to forge some links, get to know others working in related fields and discuss my research with people outside of my department. It was also an opportunity to start thinking about what lies beyond my PhD, where I might want to work and with whom and to start making links to facilitate my career progression.

Although the conference officially ended on 18 August, some additional workshops were on offer the following day. I took the opportunity to attend a symposium on 'Behavioural responses to a changing world'. Offering a more intimate setting than the large audiences of the conference, this offered the chance to be a part of some smaller, more interactive discussions.

I am very grateful to MASTS for their kind financial support of my attendance and participation in the conference. The limited budget for a PhD project does not stretch far, especially when incorporating both field and laboratory studies, as the integrated nature of my research demands. I have gained huge amounts of confidence as well as knowledge from participating in the conference and am looking forward to further opportunities to gain further experience in presenting my research and being a part of such exciting scientific events.

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