

**Dr Victoria Sleight – Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge**

**Integrative Molluscan Genomics symposium at the World Congress of Malacology  
2019, 11 – 16 August 2019**

The World Congress of Malacology happens every three years at various international locations. From the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> of August 2019 it was held at the wonderful Asilomar conference grounds, on the The conference started with a full day of single-track plenary sessions. Keynote talks were given throughout the day that introduced the themes of the conference. This initial overview day was a fantastic way to start the meeting, it was great to have all the attendees together to learn about the diverse themes being discussed, before breaking into parallel topic-focused sessions for the following three days.



View across the campus and beach of Asilomar Conference Grounds

The Asilomar conference grounds are the perfect setting for a conference. All of the accommodation, the restaurant and the meeting rooms are on a single beautiful campus, nestled within a coastal state park. For breakfast, lunch and dinner all participants ate together and so every meal was an opportunity to meet new and existing collaborators, or dine with senior heroes in all fields of malacology.

I was invited to present my ongoing research on the molecular and cellular mechanisms of molluscan shell production in the Utility of Molluscan Genomics Symposium. It was a great opportunity to communicate my research programme to the world experts and I received constructive feedback on some unpublished data before preparing for publication this year. The genomics symposium spanned two days and after all the talks, posters and discussion there was a real sense of a community coming together to exchange knowledge and overcome shared challenges.



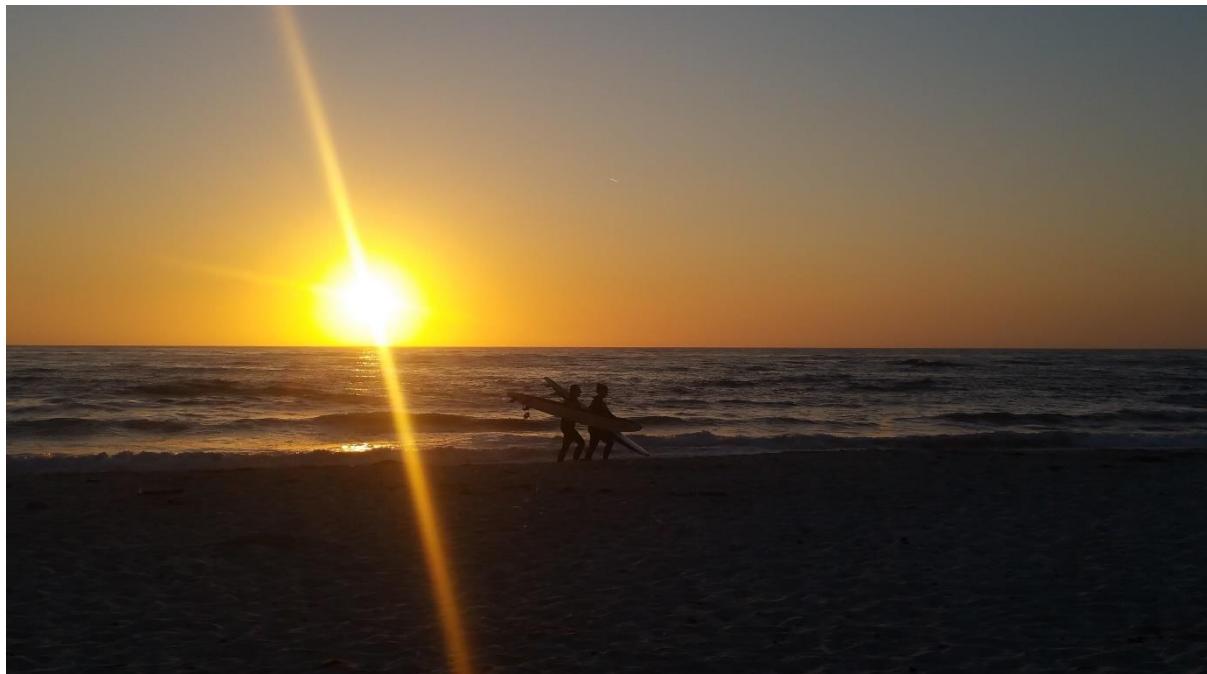
Introducing my talk and love of seashells

A personal highlight for me was getting together with collaborators from the USA. I work with a team of incredibly talented developmental biologists from UCSD Scripps (Deidre Lyons) and the University of Illinois (Jon Henry, Maryna Lesoway and Kim Perry) and together we are working to develop the slipper snail (*Crepidula*) as a transgenesis and CRISPR-capable model system for the spiralia. Meeting in person is invaluablely important to share and develop ideas for the project, to share reagents and data and to plan for future experiments. In addition, I had the opportunity to initiate some exciting new projects with international collaborators, ranging from a genome sequencing project to an experimental project looking a shell repair in a marine bivalve.



I am extremely grateful to the Royal Society of Biology for supporting my attendance at this meeting. Amongst many other benefits it allowed me, as a junior scientist on the journey to becoming a PI, to talk about my independent research and to demonstrate to the community that I am continuing to make valuable contributions to the field, under my own steam and funding, in addition to undertaking a post-doc on a different topic.

An afternoon field trip exploring local biodiversity



After dinner each evening we convened on the beach for sunset and more informal science chats