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4th World Conference on Marine Biodiversity (WCMB) in Montreal, Canada, 13 – 16 May 2018.

Thanks to the generous support of the RSB I was able to attend the 4th World Conference on Marine Biodiversity (WCMB) in Montreal, Canada this May.

The theme of this year's conference was 'Connecting with the living ocean', with sessions ranging from big data tools in marine biodiversity to hydrothermal vent ecology and marine policy and stewardship, all with the aim of finding the best ways to combine knowledge to combat the cumulative threats currently facing the world's oceans. The breadth of the conference made narrowing down the list of talks I wanted to see a challenge! As well as attending talks relevant to my own field of research I made the most of the opportunity to attend sessions in different disciplines. I particularly enjoyed the talks given by industry representatives who presented a non-academic perspective on the applications of marine research and the research-policy interface.

On the second day of the conference I presented my PhD work on global phytoplankton sensitivity to climate variability. My research attempts to bridge the gap between marine and terrestrial ecology by showing trends in responses to climate change which hold across realms. Having previously presented the work to terrestrial audiences it was very exciting for me to see what a marine audience would make of it. The talk went really well and I received some really interesting feedback which I can take forward and apply in my future work.



At the 4th World Conference on Marine Biodiversity

Another amazing opportunity came with the conference mentoring program. I was teamed with 6 international students/early career scientists to look in-depth at integrative frameworks and holistic assessments for marine health, with a focus on progress made in indicator development, ocean connectivity and large-scale biogeography as we head towards the Aichi 2020 Biodiversity Targets. We had several workshops and panel discussions during the conference with the other mentoring theme groups and are now working on a perspectives paper of research priorities for the next 10 years.

Not all was your standard conference fare at WCMB. Dr Linwood Pendleton gave an amazing play in three parts for his opening plenary on 'Rethinking Marine Conservation Science' with the help of piano



My team for the mentoring program

(Robert Hodge) and poetry (Anna Zivian), and a contemporary dance on the plight of marine biodiversity loss closed the last conference session. On the third night of the conference they took a gamble on the weather and instead of a formal conference dinner we had food trucks in the sunshine on the water front, followed by doughnuts, wine and the awards ceremony. It was a great end to the conference!

Attending and presenting at WCMB enabled me to network with and gain feedback from world leaders in my field and make valuable connections for future collaborations. It also enabled me to meet and discover the research of North American academics who don't always travel to European conferences. I am extremely grateful to the RSB for the opportunities this experience has provided me with and I would strongly encourage other early career scientists/students to apply for an RSB travel grant to support their work.



An outdoor take on the traditional conference dinner!

