

South Africa, 2018

The September of 2018 was one of the most enjoyable experiences to date! Directly, the expedition fund helped me pay for my flights from London to the African continent, this gave me the chance to complete a very interesting 3rd year SBCS module I'd set my sights on ever since I came to QM. It gave me the chance to do this under a time in my university career in which money was short, and my university was there to help me.



My Friend Ed and I, on-top of Table Mountain in Cape Town just before the sun set. It was bloody freezing but totally worth it for the view and photos!

Indirectly, it gave me so much

more than a module and 15 credits – the expedition fund gave me experiences and people and travel. I chose to buy the cheapest flights I could with the money I was awarded, so the rest of my money would go farther when I made it Africa, this,



This was me posing in the beautiful scenery of the Royal Botanical Gardens of Cape Town. On the way there we had the most memorable conversation with an Uber driver; the first thing he said to us was "If you don't like football get out of this car!", we laughed and proceeded to have some great banter about the upcoming season, and of course how it did not come home...

incidentally, resulted in a lay-over in the HOT desert city of Dubai, only thing was I would be there for 23 whole hours! When I was there, I soon realised this was not a mistake in the slightest, my friend Edward who's in the photo above was there with me. It was tough given the lack of sleep, and the heat was horrific, but it was such an enlightening experience to see the up-and-coming Arabian city... AND IT WAS FREE!

The reason I wanted to go on this trip was because it focuses on a very particular part of ecology: something known as tropical ecology, and gives special consideration in efforts to conserve African plants and animals, and the greater ecosystems. It really interests me. This was the main reason why I was heading to Africa, but I knew it was a rare thing to pay for flights to the other side of the globe, to the southern hemisphere so I decided I would fly to Cape Town, check it



Blyde river canyon. Of great interest to me as a keen botanist, we took a break away from our facility to look at bushveld ecology found at high altitudes. Also, as you can see in the bottom image, it was scenic just like many other parts of South Africa.

out, and then get a connection to Joburg'. Cape Town was fantastic, I would go so far as to say it was the best city I've been to. It was vibrant, raw, cheap and just astoundingly beautiful. After flying off to Joburg', and then a very long coach journey to the Wits Rural Facility in the Limpopo province of NE S. Africa, we were there. Our two weeks in the little 350-hectare facility was spent looking at lowveld tropical ecology, I conducted my own research project investigating insect herbivory on seed pods across tree families *Fabaceae* and *Combretaceae*, as well as learning about ecology on multiple taxa around the neighbouring Kruger National Park. All the students on the course were given an insightful talk topical to the struggles of nature reserves in sub-Saharan Africa, in particular the current human-wildlife conflicts and how trophy hunting

works. Very important considering local social problems regarding poverty, and the real-world decisions people make against easy money rewarding illegal tasks. Finally, we went on a two-day safari in Kruger National Park, seeing all the big 5 bar the southern white rhino.

I'd like to thank Queen Mary and the people behind the expedition fund. I can say from first-hand experience how important it was for me. I know it will bring many other people joy in the future, allowing them to travel and learn.



Impala Aepyceros melampus is a type of antelope we saw every day at our time in Wits Rural Facility. This was the family was a permanent resident of the facility, they prefer open spaces so they can see predators better (there were leopards on site). The stag obviously thinks the space next to the toilets was very safe – I'd see them here morning after morning...