

2nd Early Career Researcher Meeting, 18-19th March 2008 Department of Zoology, University of Oxford

The second TEG Early Career Researcher meeting saw 80 tropical researchers descend on Oxford for two days before Easter. Coming from seven different countries and representing thirty different institutions, the meeting enjoyed plenary addresses from William Laurence (Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Panama) and Callum Roberts (University of York) along with 20 oral and 29 poster presentations from young academics.

After an excellent buffet lunch, William Laurence kicked the meeting off with a plenary discussion of the “Emerging threats and research challenges in the tropics”. He identified seven key areas of concern for ecology, including threats from growing human populations, the dangers surrounding the use and manipulation of natural resources and the consequences of global climate and atmospheric change. Dr. Laurence also highlighted the importance of understanding the bigger picture in ecological research and the role of environmental synergisms’, e.g. links between forest fragmentation and fire frequency, or logging operations and hunting. The talks during the remainder of the first day generally followed a forest ecology theme and ranged from sustainable hunting, through liana abundance, to agroforestry. In the final session we finished-off with a series of talks exploring the roles of various insects on ecosystem function and biodiversity. We then all enjoyed a well-earned beverage whilst perusing the posters and discussing the day’s talks.



The evening meal at St. Hugh’s College was excellent and was followed by an opportunity for members to hone their tropical dancing skills. Salsa lessons were available to all with the event organiser, Robi Bagchi, leading the way with his enthusiastic interpretation of the salsa rhythms...



Despite some dancers continuing into the early hours of the morning the opening session on day two was busy. We were rewarded with a wide range of talks including: tropical bird diversity and evolution, modern pollen-vegetation relationships, and the sustainability of fisheries. Callum Roberts then gave the closing plenary “The unnatural history of the sea” presenting documentary evidence back to the 17th Century to illustrate the changing nature of people’s shifting perceptions of ecological baselines. His numerous examples included a quote from Captain George Shelvocke (1726) whose boat was surrounded by whales to such an extent that the crew where ‘overwhelmed by the stench of whale breath’. There are few, if any, locations in the world today where this dubious pleasure could be experienced. Illustrating more recent examples of dwindling marine resources with photos Prof. Roberts brought home the importance of understanding all facets of our planet, both past and present, if we are going to be able to preserve them for future generations. This concluded a very successful and thought-provoking meeting. Around 30 of us then opted to head for Oxford natural history museum and were treated to a behind the scenes tour of the entomology collection. This included the opportunity to view specimens collected by Darwin and Wallace and get up close and personal with a number of tropical beasts!

For further insights from our plenary speakers:

- William F. Laurance and Carlos A. Peres (eds) (2006) *Emerging Threats to Tropical Forests*. ISBN-13: 978-0226470221
- Callum Roberts (2007) *The Unnatural History of the Sea: The Past and Future of Humanity and Fishing*. ISBN-13: 978-1856752947

Principal organiser: Robert Bagchi,

Organisers: Liana Anderson, Luis Arragao, Rachel Gallery, Jessica Harms, Joe Nunˆez and Simon Queenborough.

Assistance from: the Department of Zoology staff, namely Malcolm and Phil, and the accommodation office staff at St. Hughes College.