

Royal Holloway Doctoral School Research Award

Attendance at the Congress of the European Society for Evolutionary Biology, Prague, August 2022

I was very grateful to receive a RHUL Doctoral School Research Award, which enabled me to travel to an international evolutionary biology conference in Prague last summer. Due to the Pandemic, this was the first international conference that I was able to attend during my PhD, and the first in-person conference for a while. It felt good to feel an element of “normality” returning after the past few years, and to see people face-to-face again.

The five-day conference was organised into multiple sessions on different topics, and several poster sessions. I gave a talk in the “Brain, Behaviour and Cognitive Evolution” session on a recent study that was published from our lab¹. We used bees to as an experimental model to show that short-term memory, a sub-type of memory essential to bees finding flowers, predicted foraging success, but only in plentiful environments during the spring. The trend was reversed in the summer, when there are fewer flowering plants available. Our results suggest that the evolution of memory may indeed be driven by the external environment of a species.

I also presented a poster on one of the chapters from my PhD thesis, on memory capacity and foraging patterns in bees. The poster session led to some useful discussions and feedback about my results, and it was interesting to hear perspectives of scientists from other fields. I was pleased that my poster was selected as an “Outstanding Student Poster”.

Aside from presenting my work, I also had the opportunity to meet other PhD students studying similar topics, and to attend a number of talks on topics that are not directly related to my PhD. It was interesting to hear about research in other fields, such as genomics and epigenetics, and discuss how these can be applied to some of the questions we are trying to answer.

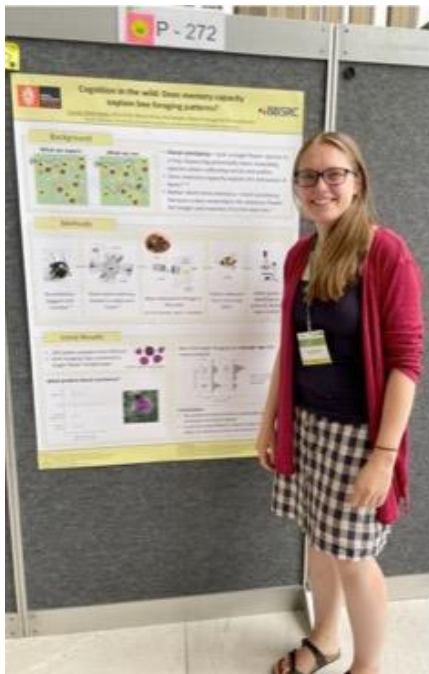
Before the conference, I also attended a one-day workshop on “Writing about Science for General Audiences”, run by EvoKE (Evolutionary Knowledge for Everyone), a community that seeks to increase science communication and public understanding in the fields of evolutionary biology (<https://evokeproject.org>). We explored how to write press releases for papers, and different tools that can be used when communicating science to non-specialist audiences. The workshop brought together scientists from all career stages, from Masters students to PIs, and it was interesting to speak to people about their career journeys and differences in institutions around the world.

Thank you once again to the Doctoral School Research Award for their support, without which this trip would not have been possible.

1 – Pull, C. D., Petkova, I., Watrobska, C., Pasquier, G., Perez Fernandez, M. & Leadbeater, E. (2022) Ecology dictates the value of memory for foraging bees. *Current Biology*. 32(19), 4279-4285.



Beautiful views of the city of Prague from the conference centre



Presenting my poster on bee cognition and foraging patterns

Cecylia Watrobska – PhD Biological Sciences