

VIII World Sponge Conference in Girona, Spain, 20-24 September 2010  
The Western Society of Naturalists (WSN) Meeting, USA, 10-11 November 2010.  
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I am pleased to say that my attendance to the VIII World Sponge Conference in Girona, Spain was of great benefit to my professional development. The abstract I submitted was chosen as an oral presentation, so I had the opportunity to present part of the work I have been doing for my PhD to an international audience. After my presentation, I got good comments and feedback on my work and it was very interesting to meet and chat with most of the authorities on sponge research that were present.

Although my research focused on species that are particularly abundant and widely distributed along the south coast of Wellington, the findings and methods of my work can be applied in other areas where there is a high abundance of sponges and therefore potentially important interaction in the cycling of food particles between sponges and the water column. Consequently, people were interested in hearing about the research that is being carried out on sponges in this part of the world, and it was also interesting for me to learn about the great diversity of studies that are being carried out worldwide on different areas of sponge research.

Very little is known about the New Zealand sponge fauna and its ecology compared with other temperate regions, such as southern Australia. Therefore, it was a great opportunity to present the work that our research group is carrying out in New Zealand. Together with my PhD colleagues and James Bell (our supervisor) who also attended the conference, we were the only people showing studies from New Zealand, and I believe we did a good job in presenting the quality and innovative research carried out here. It was also a very good opportunity to interact with future potential employers, to discuss prospective post-doctoral projects, and future collaborations in common areas of interest with overseas institutions.

I would like to finish by thanking the New Zealand Marine Sciences Society for the award I was given to attend my first overseas conference in Girona, Spain. Overall, It was a great experience!

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