DLS Department of Life Sciences
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Organisms and the Environment
Newsletter 2025

List of Courses

BSc
Animal Behaviour; Biology; Ecology; Marine & Freshwater Biology; Wildlife Conservation; Zoology
MBiol
Zoology; Marine & Freshwater Biology
Interested?
Phone Dr Helen Marshall on 01970 628445
or Email: hem@aber.ac.uk

Aber Zoology graduate researches coral reefs in the Indian Ocean

Photo: Jay Burk

Jason Burk, Aberystwyth graduate, says: “Aberystwyth will forever hold a place in my heart and remains one of my favourite destinations. However, my time at Aberystwyth University has allowed to develop and explore my passion for the natural world, and to do so in some truly incredible places. The skills developed during BSc Zoology and MRes Biosciences at Aber have led me to research and monitor coral reef, turtle, marine mammal, seabird and coastal insect populations, as well as leading me onto my current PhD at the University of Essex. This PhD is on the genomic connectivity, hydrodynamics and phylogenomics of shallow sea coral reefs across the Indian Ocean. We hope to explore the drivers of coral population structure to enable us to better understand how coral reefs will cope in the face of climate change”.

Butterflies prefer UV light

“Ethical guidelines for butterfly keepers specifically mention food, space, temperature, humidity and hygiene, but not light. Understanding their lighting needs could improve butterfly house husbandry, and in turn allow more on-site breeding and healthier insects.”

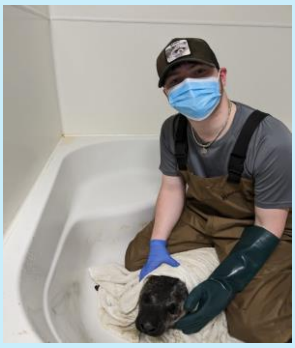
Butterflies prefer lighting that contains ultraviolet according to a new study by Aberystwyth University BSc Biology and PhD graduate Dr Rowan Thomas.

Rowan’s research, published in the journal Animal Behaviour, shows that while artificial lighting without UV does not affect the activity of painted lady butterflies, when given a choice, they prefer ultraviolet light. The findings have implications for the welfare of captive animals, because the artificial lighting used in indoor enclosures often lacks UV wavelengths that many non-human animals are sensitive to.

Studying the effect of climate change on competition between birds

Nest boxes in local woodland are being surveyed as part of a long-term study. Project leader and AU lecturer Dr Peter Korsten said: "We know that a warmer spring is already leading to birds breeding earlier, and we hope to understand more about how this might affect the competition between different bird species”. Dr Korsten has been assisted by BSc Wildlife Conservation students Isobel Griffith and Rose Markham-Gill. Rose said, “I have loved being part of nest box checks this year and look forward to gathering more data over the next few years for my dissertation and for Peter’s further research. It’s such a great thing having access to the nest boxes and watching spring unfold. Every week has been exciting and allowed me to appreciate nature in a way I never could have before.”

Wildlife rehabilitation in Canada! BSc Zoology (with Integrated Year in Industry) student Tyler Landon completed a 10-month placement with 'Hope for Wildlife', a wildlife rehabilitation sanctuary in Nova Scotia, Canada. During the placement Tyler developed wildlife rehabilitation skills working with injured and orphaned animals from a range of species, including raccoons, bobcats, otters and seals. "During my time as staff, I trained and mentored new interns and learnt more about the animal species I specialized in working with, overall helping build my confidence in the industry and the skills required to be a part of it".



Coral reef research in Australia! BSc Marine & Freshwater Biology (with Integrated Year in Industry) student Nina Strzelecka worked for 8 months as a research assistant at the Australian Institute of Marine Science. Nina's project focused on metabarcoding *Acropora tenuis* (branching coral) from various locations in Ningaloo Marine Park to investigate whether the varying conditions around the park create varying microbial communities. Nina's role was to extract microbial DNA and optimise a PCR protocol. "I was also luckily enough to participate in their research trip where I got to dive and collect coral samples".

Insect portraits to be published in new book

My three years in Aberystwyth were among the happiest of my life. There's something truly special about research that makes you feel like you're standing at the frontier of discovery, with each finding extending the boundaries of knowledge. Just before arriving in Aber, I had started experimenting with insect photography, a fascinating process that transforms the unremarkable blobs flying past into what they truly are—grotesque, yet sometimes oddly beautiful, alien creatures. It was during my time at Aberystwyth University that this passion truly took shape. While pursuing a PhD on insect behavior, I came to realize that the lives of insects are equally grotesque, yet strangely beautiful. This journey ultimately led to the release of my book *'Insect Portraits'*, a collection of portrait-style photographs paired with accompanying stories, showcasing the extraordinary nature of these creatures – Dr Lisa Clancy.

Understanding linear infrastructure ecology to help protect wildlife

Human infrastructure (e.g. roads, power lines) has countless adverse effects on global biodiversity and there are still many knowledge gaps regarding the extent of these impacts and how to mitigate them. Aberystwyth University lecturer Dr Bibi Linden is attempting to fill these gaps, studying primates of high conservation concern in South Africa, as well as UK mammal species, to support species conservation efforts. Our students are also gaining an understanding of these issues, thanks to Bibi's research-led teaching.