

6th EWDA Workshop in Veyrier-du-Lac, France, March 26th-29th, 2015



When I decided to apply to the 6th EWDA Student Workshop I had no idea what to expect but I was super excited and very much looking forward to it. I always had a keen interest on learning more about wildlife diseases and how they affected animal conservation so this workshop sounded perfect. I was checking my emails every day, in the hope of finding an email confirming I was selected to participate in the workshop. And indeed I was.

I travelled from London to this small but beautiful town in the South of France to attend what would be the best four days of my year so far. Before I get to that let me tell you a bit about myself first.

I am a biologist who moved to London from Portugal where I did a masters in Wild Animal Biology. Since finishing that degree in 2013, I have been trying to get my thesis published and trying to find a job. In March of this year, when I applied to the EWDA Student Workshop, I was exactly where I was 1.5 years ago – no thesis published and no job. I was very demotivated and in need of something to happen, something life-changing, something inspirational that would slap me across the face and make me open my eyes. So, as you might be starting to realise, I had very high expectations of this 4-day long workshop in that little town in the South of France. As incredible and cliché as it might sound, my expectations were not met, they were exceeded.

This workshop was absolutely brilliant and exactly what I needed. Not only was the location fabulous, breath-taking and relaxing but the food... Man.... Do not get me starting on the food... I am sure that was all carefully thought and planned because, I am not going to sugar coat it, the workshop was intense. It was a lot of information but, believe it, your brain does take it in. The core of EWDA is the one-health concept and this particular workshop was about “Human Drivers of Emerging Diseases. They had this great idea of participants giving 5 minute presentations on a certain topic. So if you are

a bit rusty on your infectious diseases or terminology (as a biologist with not in depth knowledge of this I found it extremely useful), in sum, the basics, it is genius. The topics included a range of issues such as the Ebola outbreak, emerging zoonotic diseases and its drivers, infectious wildlife diseases such as West Nile Virus, Avian Influenza, Tuberculosis, Hendra virus, SARS and many others. These short presentations were intercalated with lectures from amazing speakers from well-known international and European organisations such as Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and others. On our third day, a personal favourite, we got to do our small group working sessions. For these, each lecturer had a small group of students that would discuss ideas over a pre-decided theme and would, the next day, share the main conclusions of those sessions with everyone. This year we heard about estimating prevalence and abundance index of commensal mammals, the role of education in achieving one-health objectives, how to design a wildlife health surveillance programme, role of humans in controlling wildlife diseases, human viruses emerging from the animal world and using modelling to understand disease dynamics.

It wasn't all work and no fun though. The first day was quite relaxed and a great chance to get to know speakers and colleagues. There was even a movie, a science trivia night and an auction! There were also casual and informative panel discussions where the role of women in science and the challenges of pursuing a career in science and research were discussed.

Overall it was an amazing experience and extremely useful and inspirational. I learned so much from the speakers and participants in just 4 days and left there ready to change my life and start making things happen for myself.

So if you are interested or would like to know more about this increasingly important one-health concept or just need a little push to decide your career path or confirm it, this workshop is for you. You will learn more than you think you would in a short period of time and it is a great way to debate ideas with people with different scientific and cultural backgrounds and, of course, to do some networking.