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The International Symposium on Foraminifera 2014, Chile

The Society of Biology travel grant enabled me to travel to Concepcion in Chile for the International Symposium on Foraminifera. This conference is the only dedicated foraminifera conference, held every four years and attended by the entire international community of scientists working on foraminifera. It was the first time I had attended this conference, and it has played a large role in helping me become a part of the foraminifera research community.

Foraminifera (forams) are hugely significant, predominantly marine, protists. Many foram species precipitate a calcium carbonate shell, which on foram death, sinks to the ocean floor. This process is responsible for locking away huge amounts of carbon from the atmosphere to the deep oceans in the form of a fossil record that spans over 180 million years.

This record holds paleoclimate information such as sea surface temperatures from the time of shell formation, and is therefore hugely significant in interpreting past climate to predict the impacts of future climate change. Further, calcium carbonate is more readily dissolved under more acidic conditions and therefore as the oceans warm up, it is likely that less calcium carbonate will be locked into ocean sediments and instead it will be released into the atmosphere as CO₂. It is imperative that an understanding of foram response to climate change is well understood.



Very little is understood of the biology of these protozoans, and their genetics are somewhat complicated. The forams 2014 conference was an opportunity for scientists to share their research, new methods, new data, and to set up some new international collaborations. I presented two posters at the conference on genetic work done over the last two years, and also had chance to meet with collaborators regarding my new project, which aims to study foram-bacterial interactions.



Meeting with scientists in the same field is hugely rewarding and motivating. I was able to discuss some of my methodology and gain valuable information on how to progress with some of the trickier aspects of my study. I would encourage anyone unsure about attending a conference to do so as it can only be of great benefit in terms of confidence, information sharing and becoming a part of the scientific community.

The Society of Biology grants are substantial enough to enable significant travel, so are well worth applying for.

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An exciting outcome of this conference is that in four years' time the symposium is coming to Edinburgh, and there will be opportunity for me to be a part of the organising committee. I will not need a travel grant on that occasion!