

Muddy Knees, Cold Seas and Mangrove Trees

By Yasmine Gatt

MSc. Marine Biology

University of Groningen

Having been fascinated by the marine environment from a young age I knew I wanted to focus my studies and interests on this topic. After conducting my bachelor's thesis on a marine issue, I found that my interest had continued to be piqued, so I started looking for a masters that would aid me on this journey. After having been successfully accepted at the University of Groningen I began to read for an MSc. in Marine Biology.

The masters itself is a 2-year course and as such I was immensely grateful to be an awardee of the Tertiary Education Scholarship Scheme (TESS) as it partially funded my studies. From the first day it was immediately obvious that the course was designed to expose students to as many different facets of marine biology as possible. They did not only have marine related courses, they offered statistic course, science communication courses and courses discussing scientific ethical issues and how to handle them. This equipped me with the necessary tools I needed to start my journey into academia.

During the first few months of the masters, the courses were heavily field work based and as such we had time to develop our skills. A visit was carried out in the Royal Netherlands Institute for Sea Research at both Yerseke and Texel where we had a tour of the facility and the research being carried out. Our first fieldwork experience involved an overnight stay at the Research Station in Schiermonnikoog one of the Dutch islands. It was my first time being exposed to a mudflat and as such there were some interesting developments where I ended up navigating the area on my knees, unfortunately my boots didn't get the memo and parted with my feet after a few minutes which resulted in an interesting predicament for me. It was part of the learning curve which I greatly enjoyed as it was the first time I felt like a proper scientist, knee deep in the mud measuring the tidal range and quantifying the chlorophyll content in the Wadden Sea. Another memorable fieldwork experience was the week long stay in Sweden at the Klubbans Biological Station. During our weeklong stay we had to design and carry out an experiment in the surrounding area, which involved snorkelling in the warm 10 °C water (with wet suits) to collect crabs and seaweed and rowing to set traps in place.

After following the mandatory courses required, I started my first research project in February. This was an 8-month long journey which dealt with restoration of intertidal seagrass in the Dutch Wadden Sea. The project involved a substantial amount of fieldwork which was carried out on both mudflats and a sandy location. During this time, we worked with both the local community and nature managers.

For my second research project my university mentor encouraged me to look for projects abroad. As such after emailing various scientist whose research I was interested in, I received a positive reply. I performed my second research project in conjunction with the University of Cambridge where I conducted a literature review on mangrove restoration to then compute an evidence-based map related to the information found in the published literature. For the duration of the project, I am worked in close collaboration with 'WWF' and the Global Mangrove Alliance so that eventually my work can be used for future restoration. I also held a webinar aimed at scientists involved in mangrove restoration so that they can give feedback on

my project and eventually contribute to the position piece. This project is desk based which will help me develop my statistical skills.