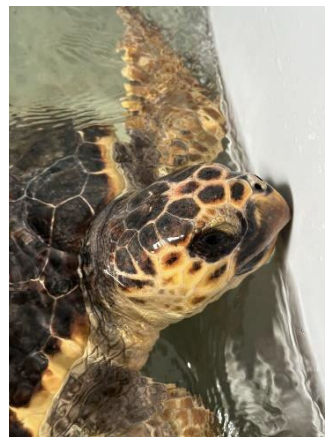


QMUL Expediton Funds 2023/2024 - Report

As a MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation student specializing in Marine Ecology, I am deeply grateful for the bursary that allowed me to attend the CESTHA Summer School.

CESTHA, Centro Sperimentale per la Tutela degli Habitat (Experimental Center for the Protection of Habitats), is an NGO in Marina di Ravenna, Italy, focused on marine conservation and sustainable fishing practices. CESTHA collaborates with the University of Padova and the University of Bologna to advance research in these fields. Through these partnerships, it offers valuable opportunities for master's students, PhD candidates, and researchers to participate in cutting-edge research projects and conservation programs. This collaboration enables students and scientists to gain hands-on experience in marine biology and contribute to important conservation efforts, fostering the next generation of marine ecologists and conservationists. It hosts a Summer School that offers an unparalleled opportunity and intensive training in marine biology and conservation topics, aiming to enhance participants' practical skills. The program's focus on sea turtles and Elasmobranchii conservation and sustainable fishing practices aligned perfectly with my academic interests and career aspirations. Working alongside CESTHA's marine biologists was a highlight of the program.



I assisted in managing rescued sea turtles, administering therapies, and feeding, and release them back to their natural habitat. This experience significantly enhanced my understanding of sea turtle conservation and the challenges these species face in the wild.



The program provided extensive field research opportunities, including the application of a GPS tracking device on a sea turtle prior to its release into the sea, participating in avifauna census, monitoring alien species with a particular focus on the invasive blue crab, and conducting eco-trekking and kayaking in the Po Delta Park.



These activities sharpened my field research skills and provided practical experience in data collection and analysis.

The program also featured a series of lectures on various topics, such as the identification, biology, and conservation of sea turtles and Elasmobranchii, the biology and conservation of seahorses in the Mediterranean, fishing practices in the Northern Adriatic. Additionally, it highlighted CESTHA's contributions through its relative conservation programs. I learned about current challenges in fisheries management in the Northern Adriatic Sea, innovative approaches to reduce bycatch, and methods for collaborating with local fishing communities to promote sustainable practices.



Throughout the Summer School, I developed several key skills: practical sea turtles rescue, care and rehabilitation techniques, application of GPS tracking devices on a sea turtle's

carapace, field research methodologies and data collection, species identification, dissection and analysis of gut content, scientific outreach and community engagement strategies.

Attending the CESTHA Summer School has significantly impacted my academic and professional trajectory. It has reinforced my commitment to marine conservation and clarified my career goals. The hands-on experience has complemented my theoretical knowledge. Moreover, networking with professionals and fellow students has expanded my professional connections in the field. Participating in real-world conservation efforts has given me valuable insights into the practical challenges and rewards of this work.



The CESTHA Summer School has been an invaluable experience that has enriched my academic journey and professional development. CESTHA is located in my hometown where my family still resides, therefore I had the opportunity to reconnect them and my friends whilst engaging with marine ecology research and conservation work. The knowledge and skills I've gained will undoubtedly contribute to my future studies and career. I am deeply grateful of the university's support through the bursary, which made this transformative experience possible.