

Learning to Save Species from Extinction by Natalya Lawrence



Natalya Lawrence is Project Coordinator at the Offshore Islands Conservation Programme in Antigua, and took the Endangered Species Recovery course at Durrell Conservation Academy in 2017.

The Durrell Academy's Endangered Species Recovery Course completely transformed my appreciation for conservation.

In two weeks, I came to have a greater understanding of all that is involved in rescuing animals on the brink of extinction. Things began to become clear to me. I understood simple things like why some animals had lots of offspring, and very quickly, while others were on the other end of the reproductive spectrum. Like a bright ray of sunshine, the mark-recapture method of monitoring wildlife made sense to me; it took a simple field exercise!

We learned of Durrell's work in far-away (for me!) places, the relationship building as cultural and religious barriers were penetrated, the hiking and revisiting sites for years to find species thought to be extinct, and the challenges and successes of it all.

I gained a greater appreciation for Durrell's work. They pride themselves on saving the 'little brown jobs' which are animals that are not necessarily attractive conservation flagship species: little brown bunnies here, little brown tamarins there, and yes, little racers too! I was so excited to see the work in Antigua and also Saint Lucia to conserve racers was heavily highlighted during the course.

Apart from the core course, my mentor arranged for me to do additional training with some specialists within and outside the walls of Jersey Zoo. I had the distinct privilege of banding birds in St. Ouen's Bay with Dave Buxton and his colleagues. In those few days, I learned a great deal about birds fattening up for their long journey.

I also had a great time surveying birds at various points on the island, including Sorel and St. Ouen's Bay, with Durrell's Head of Bird Conservation, Dr Glyn Young. During these surveys, he trained me to identify birds by their silhouette, their call and their flight pattern. He also taught me to pick the tastier black berries!

I left Jersey, full of wonderful memories and rich learning experiences. I applaud Durrell for the work that they are doing to fight extinction, even in tiny, little-known countries like mine.