

THE ROAD TO SCIENCE



FREDA FENGYI GUO

2018 MPhil Graduate (major in Ecology)

2016 BSc Graduate (double major in Ecology & Biodiversity and Environmental Sciences)

Profile

- Pilot Scheme on International Experience for RPg Students (HKU) at University of Washington (2017)
- Hong Kong Natural History Society Prize for Outstanding Student in Ecology & Biodiversity (2016)
- Field Course to South Africa (2016)
- Undergraduate Research Fellowship Scheme, HKU (2016)
- Exchange study at University of California, Davis (2015)
- Summer Research Fellowship Scheme, HKU (2014)

I had always dreamt of becoming a scientist since childhood, yet I did not know what that actually meant until I completed my first research project through the Summer Research Fellowship (SRF) scheme at HKU.

When I participated in the SRF scheme in my second year as an undergraduate student, I had never expected that I would one day publish my work “like a scientist”. At that time despite two years of learning fundamentals, I was still like a kid wandering outside the palace of science, curiously looking through the window and trying to figure out what was happening inside. Thankfully, my great supervisors, Dr Caroline Dingle and Dr Timothy Bonebrake kindly opened the gate and guided me to the world of scientific

research. Starting from zero, I spent the whole summer recording dove coos all over Hong Kong, getting chased by dogs sometimes and fully experienced the excitement and depression throughout the research process. With consistent guidance from my supervisors, I learned and got adapted to the science world step by step: from the tiniest (and always important) lesson like “do not be lazy and expect a tidy reference list from Endnote without double checking”, to eventually going through the long, long peer-review process and publishing my first manuscript that had been edited for dozens of times.

Despite all the difficulties and sometimes tediousness, this initial exploration greatly aroused my enthusiasm and made me realized that research was never too far away even for undergraduate students. Therefore, I then did my final year project under the Undergraduate Research Fellowship Programme (URFP) to continue studying bird dialects across geographic ranges, which, together with the previous SRF experience, further aroused my interests in ecology and evolution, and ultimately motivated me to pursue graduate study in this field.

As I continued the journey as an MPhil student working with Dr Bonebrake at HKU, I realised how valuable those past experiences were in contributing to my research career, not only in terms of background knowledge and necessary skillsets, but also the mind-set of embracing uncertainty and never give up. I still remembered and agreed with the advice that Prof. Ray Huey kindly gave me during my visit to the University of Washington, to “work on questions that are challenging, because they are the

most interesting ones”. It could be daunting sometimes to pick a research question that no one had studied before, but thanks to the supports from my supervisor and many collaborators, I managed to finish my thesis on time and publish one of the chapters in Nature Communications.



Looking back, I was very grateful to all these priceless opportunities to experience research and get on the road towards science, which had made me more determined to continue the adventure to further explore the beauty of nature, because these were things that I genuinely enjoyed.

“Enjoy the work that you like, and become the person that you want to be.”