

Ciara McCarthy (Natural Sciences) - La Quinta de San Pedro Field Centre, Portugal, March 2016

In March I travelled to La Quinta de San Pedro Field Centre near Lisbon for a Plant Sciences Field Course. The trip gave us the opportunity to consolidate what we had learnt in lectures and well as carry out projects in groups.

On the first day we explored the Quinta and learnt the distinguishing features of plants from important families, so that we would be able to identify plants that we came across throughout the trip. For the next few days we went on a series of day trips, for example to the Troia Peninsula. Here we explored saltmarsh and sand dune successive communities, and learnt more about the adaptations that enable plants to survive in these environments.

For the rest of the trip we carried out our own group projects. This gave us the opportunity to design and carry out our own experiments, which is very different from second year practical classes. We were also using equipment that we had only had limited experience using in practicals, for example LiCOR. This meant that by the end of the week I felt much more familiar with the experimental techniques we had studied throughout the year, and had a better understanding of how they worked. Carrying out these projects involved working in groups and having to overcome problems when experiments (or the weather) didn't go as planned. At the end of the week we presented our results to the rest of the group.

Throughout the week, we had presentations from the postdocs and PhD students on the trip telling us a bit about their own research. This gave us a taster of the huge range of cutting edge research being carried out in the Plant Sciences department.

The trip was a really enjoyable week as well as being hugely beneficial for revision. I would definitely recommend it to future second year Plant Sciences students!