A day in the life of…

Name: Josh Filer

Job title: PhD Student, Behavioural Ecology of Fish (Elasmobranch Behaviour), Department of Biology, University of Leicester (based at the Marine Biological Association of the United Kingdom).

Responsibilities:

Research – experimental design and data analysis from laboratory and field collected data; reporting results, reviewing literature and writing manuscripts.
Animal husbandry – feeding and checking the health of fish held in the laboratory.

Daily routine:

The daily routine varies dramatically but generally involves: animal husbandry duties at least once per day; designing experiments and building or adjusting experimental equipment; running experiments; reading and reviewing published work in related disciplines; statistical analysis of collected data; and writing reports, reviews or manuscripts.

How I got here:

I volunteered on a conservation expedition in Honduras and worked voluntarily at a marine science education and research institute in California before reading for a degree in Biology and Oceanography at the University of Southampton. Whilst at Southampton I undertook a research project on fish aggression in Indonesia. After graduating from University I enrolled in a Masters by Research degree in Marine Biology at the University of Plymouth, where I undertook a research project investigating electroreception in the small spotted catshark. Upon completion of my Masters I wrote a research proposal to gain funding from the Fisheries Society of the British Isles (FSBI) for a PhD concerning predatory behaviour of elasmobranchs.

Best bits:

The best bits of the job are the interesting things you discover about the animals you are studying. Finding out new information that has the potential to inform conservation management decisions is a key goal and one that can be very rewarding. Also being able to formulate your own questions and trying to find answers to them is enjoyable. The fact that every day is different and you can do a variety of different things and visit different places (fieldwork) is also a key lure to this type of job. Also working with interesting people who have similar lifestyles and attitudes as you is great.

Worst bits:

Setting up experiments that take ages only for your equipment to fail at the vital time can be extremely frustrating. The work is also heavily reliant on the use of computers, which can crash and lose your data or reports. The publishing process is highly competitive and therefore it can be difficult to get work into journals. Also securing funding is highly competitive as there is little money available for research.