

Update on POGO capacity building

Special POGO Grant to attend SAHFOS-MBA Phytoplankton Identification Workshop

This year, POGO decided to sponsor a young scientist from a developing country, to attend the SAHFOS/MBA Phytoplankton Identification Workshop that was run from 3rd to 13th July in Plymouth. This was decided in the context of POGO's support for the development of the Global Alliance of CPR Surveys (see p. 5), and in particular its expansion to developing countries. Among the fifty or so applications received, the workshop organisers selected Dr. Gaston Almandoz, from National University of La Plata in Argentina.

At the end of the course, Gaston was invited to visit the POGO Secretariat and PML, to give him the opportunity to meet some PML scientists and to give a presentation on his current work, and on how the phytoplankton workshop will help him to further develop his research. Gaston wrote the following report on his experience in Plymouth.

"The 2nd International Marine Phytoplankton Identification Workshop was jointly run by the Marine Biological Association (MBA) and the Sir Alister Hardy Foundation for Ocean Science (SAHFOS). The international experts, Prof. Carmelo Tomas, Dr. Karen Steidinger, Dr. Diana Sarno and Dr. Ian Probert, were the professors in charge of the workshop. A total of 20 students attended, from the United Kingdom, Italy, Portugal, Finland, Estonia, Saudi Arabia, Namibia, Ghana, South Africa, the United States and Argentina.

The main topics covered during the workshop were the classification and taxonomy of the major marine microalgal groups (diatoms, dinoflagellates and other marine flagellates), but there were also practicing classes on methodologies and techniques including: sampling, settling and slide preparation, cell counting, isolation, microscopy and culturing. Likewise, a great diversity of specimens were observed during laboratory sessions, using more than 70 living cultures from the MBA Culture Collection and fixed field samples.

The possibility to attend this relevant workshop represented a big impulse to my research career. As part of my work, I routinely analyze phytoplankton samples from different

Argentine and Antarctic, both poorly known environments. Consequently, the identification of species, genus or even higher groups is a hard challenge for me. In this sense, to take part in the MBA Workshop gave me the opportunity to improve and update my knowledge of marine phytoplankton taxonomy, and will help me to solve my current problems with species identification.



Gaston taking part in a practical session on identifying phytoplankton species.

Attending the workshop also allowed me to establish new contacts for future research. It was really invaluable to meet some of the most renowned phytoplankton taxonomists in the world. They were all very friendly and gave me the chance to discuss with them about particular problems I have during the identification of some poorly known taxa. Given that the taxonomy of some marine flagellates is a research field that is currently relatively unexplored in Argentina, this first contact with international experts could result in the establishment of new cooperation programs in the near future.

I hope the gained experience will be useful in the organization of a South-American course on taxonomy and toxicology of harmful algae, to be held in Argentina during 2014. This course, which had a first edition in November 2007, is now being planned together with Dr. Martha Ferrario and collaborators (University of La Plata) and Dr. Nora Montoya and collaborators (INIDEP), in answer to the increasing problems related to harmful algae blooms in the region and the importance to disseminate knowledge in this field."



Gaston giving a presentation at Plymouth Marine Laboratory.



Gaston with course tutors, and world experts in phytoplankton taxonomy, Karen Steidinger and Carmelo Tomas.