



## Wildlife conservation MSc student, Veronica Price-Jones, presents at international meeting!

In May I was granted the opportunity to take part in my first academic conference. It was an opportunity made possible by my time in the MSc Animal Behaviour: Applications for Conservation program at ARU.

**The conference was hosted by the European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST) Action CA17122. I became involved in the Action, known as 'Increasing understanding of alien species through citizen science' (or by the shorter moniker 'Alien-CSI'), through my master's dissertation. When I began to search for an online dissertation topic in spring 2020, my supervisor, Dr Peter Brown, invited me to analyse survey data produced by two of the Action's working groups. Two years later, I am extremely grateful for the opportunity, and the incredible personal and professional development it has allowed.**

Although prior to that moment, I was not very involved with citizen science, I soon discovered a new philosophy that I found remarkably compelling: the importance of involving local communities in conservation work. This is a way of not only expanding the scope of data collection, but also of fostering a

love and curiosity for nature in a society that is becoming disconnected from it.

In September 2020, I submitted my dissertation and a few weeks later, I graduated from my program, but it was not long afterwards that talk arose about submitting the survey results and analysis to a journal. One thing led to another, and a few weeks ago I found myself in sunny Aveiro, Portugal, for the Action's final major conference.

I have had few such enriching experiences in my professional career. Not only was I finally able to meet face-to-face the working group members with whom I had had hours of Zoom calls, I was also able to get to know many other influential researchers in the overlapping fields of citizen science and alien species. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to present the results of my own analysis, and I was proud of my presentation. When the conference had to finally come to an end, it did so on a

high note, with a conference dinner and a BioBlitz on the beach.

All in all, my experience has shown me how my time at ARU continues to benefit my career. Exactly one year before Aveiro, it led me to my current role as the Partners in Conservation and Stewardship Technician with the Kawartha Land Trust. For the past fourteen months, I have taken part in field work (e.g., managing invasive species and classifying shoreline by canoe) and computer tasks (e.g., GIS mapping and preparing stewardship guides to empower and celebrate the accomplishments of private landowners). Looking back, I am grateful to have met everyone with whom I worked at ARU and in the COST Action, and looking ahead, I am excited to see what the future will bring as I apply the knowledge I have gained.

**Find out more about our Applied Wildlife Conservation MSc.**