



Explorers Return from Rainforests and Coral Reefs

St. Ambrose College A level biologists have returned from a once in a lifetime research expedition to Indonesia's rainforests and coral reefs as part of an international conservation project.

15 young men aged from 15 to 18 accompanied by Biology teachers Amy Drogan and Paul Allen were the hands and eyes of Operation Wallacea, working alongside leading scientists from U.S., U.K and European universities to monitor flora and fauna both in the rain forests and the coral reef.

In Week One the party was based in the tropical rainforest in Buton carrying out their data collection as well as learning jungle survival skills, all the time sleeping in hammocks and washing in the rivers.



Amy Drogan said: "Separated from other landmasses by deep ocean channels, the rainforest has a high percentage of endemic species. There are 127 mammal species of which 62% are endemic, 700 bird species of which 32% are endemic and 74 species of herpetofauna of which 38% are endemic."

In the second week, they moved to sea and the small island of Hoga in the ecologically essential coral triangle in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, here staying in the relative luxury of wooden huts beside the azure waters. While only covering 1.6% of the planet's oceanic area, the region has 76% of all known coral species in the world, and again is vital to our planet's precious natural balance.

The trip left a lasting impression on the young men. James Bennett, 17, from Didsbury, who wants to read Medicine at university, said: "It

was a complete culture change. A different way of life totally, and it was a privilege to contribute to the collection of carbon data in the rainforests and to monitor the mammals, amphibians and insect life."

Toby Leigh, 17, from Sale, who wants to study Biological Sciences, said: "I enjoyed the practical element of the expedition and that we were able to make a positive contribution to very important research. We were lucky to see some fabulous wildlife including Macaque monkeys, Cuscus, an endemic marsupial,, snakes and lizards; the type of wildlife you simply never see in South Manchester."

Edward Kaufman, 17, from Sale: "I enjoyed both elements: Working in the rainforest was fascinating but quite physically demanding in the difficult conditions, then the diving in the coral reef was fantastic and very relaxed. Even in such a remote place you could see the damage being wrought by pollution and every day the divers would dredge the seabed for plastics as part of a daily routine."

Operation Wallacea is named after Alfred Russel Wallace, the 19th century English explorer and naturalist, who remains in the shadow of Charles Darwin, but for many of today's top scientists was just as influential.

St. Ambrose Biology Teacher Paul Allen said: "Our students were a valuable resource to the team of international scientists and weren't regarded as students but as co-workers and we hope this expedition will have fired their enthusiasm for careers in science and research."

