My Summer at Spurn

I found my placement at Humber INCA’s estuary conference, which I visited whilst researching my term paper. I took every opportunity to hand out cards (and ask the speakers lots of awkward questions so I’d get recognized). Luckily, after a few hours of slightly nervous attempts to mingle with local businesses and conservation groups, I came across Andy from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. After a few months of emails we’d roughed out a suitable project.

From there the fun started, arranging accommodation for two months in a bunkhouse with only three rooms is tricky, but the folks at Friends of Spurn put me up and put up with me. Not owning a car, trying to work out the logistics of getting my gear on site and how to feed myself when the nearest shop – a village store supplying an assortment of tins - was over three miles away was an interesting problem. I know a six mile round trip for food shopping doesn’t seem so bad, but the choice was do it really frequently or suffer a very heavy rucksack.

If you aren’t familiar with Spurn Point, it’s a spit of sand over boulder clay extending 3 miles into the Humber Estuary managed by Yorkshire Wildlife Trust. The reserve comprises one of the only stretches of sand in Yorkshire, extensive mudflats, swathes of sea buckthorn, the remains of an extensive World War II camp, and two listed lighthouses. It’s visited daily by birdwatchers, bait diggers, Ports Association pilots, lifeboat crew members and their families, walkers and sunbathers.

Into all of this I arrived and, thankfully, was told by Andy to take a few days to get to know the place better. Then the “work” began, daily trekking the three miles of the reserve carrying my questionnaires, sitting quietly watching the wildlife as I monitored traffic type and flow, talking to the lifeboat crew in their little café on my lunch. I’d usually be outside from nine until six (longer if I ate my breakfast on the beach).
My evenings were taken up by data entry, background reading and occasionally cooking for Sacha, the Little Tern warden, and Adam, Spurn’s assistant warden. On the odd day off I’d help out by taking gate money and manning the information centre. The bunkhouse turned out to be perfect for what I needed and the other visitors – many regulars – were happy to answer my questions and include me in the evening’s entertainment.

Okay, other people went to exotic locations and worked alongside bigger organizations, but my placement was still one of the best parts of my MSc. I spent two beautiful months in a fabulous location, saw incredibly rare sights, and met some dedicated naturalists and all round fun people.