For my summer placement as part of the Marine Environmental Management MSc I chose to go somewhere I have a deep connection with and lived for a short while as a child – Scotland! As part of my project I was based at The James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen and carried out my fieldwork at Forvie National Nature Reserve, 15 miles or so north of central Aberdeen. The reserve encompasses part of Ythan estuary, it has a North Sea coastline and is managed by Scottish Natural Heritage. It has 1000ha of stunning coastal sand dunes and dune heath which are the largest dunes I have ever seen! The reserve was designated as a national nature reserve in 1959 and has since been recognised as an area of international importance for wildlife. Forvie Nature Reserve hosts an abundance of wildlife; Britain’s largest breeding colony of eiders, four species of breeding terns and an abundance of wildfowl and waders. Not forgetting to mention the inquisitive and vocal colony of seals which seasonally inhabit the shoreline near the mouth of the estuary!

There were two aspects to my project, the first was to measure cultural ecosystem services in a coastal environment (Forvie Nature Reserve) to establish what motivated individuals to visit the reserve and what was the derived effect and/or benefit they received from doing this. The second part of my project was to compare how motivation and derived effect and/or benefit varies between a coastal environment and an urban green space. My fieldwork comprised participant observations (to build a picture of how individuals use the reserve and what activities take place) and participant interviews. I had 4 transects on the reserve, each of which was in a different habitat (estuary, saltmarsh, dunes and sandy beaches). For consistency where possible the transects were the same for the participant observations and the interviews. In total I managed to collect 127 interviews. Some of the main findings of my study were that the benefit/effect of time spent at the reserve was on the whole an enhanced state of mental and physical wellbeing. Also, although individuals did not necessarily quote relaxation as a motivation factor on the whole this was the most commonly noted effect from being at the reserve.

I found working on this project highly rewarding and interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed my summer placement. It gave me opportunity to put in to practice previous reading and learning throughout the duration of the MSc as well as experience fieldwork first hand. I met some great people, learnt invaluable skills and am looking forward to developing my skills further and putting my new found knowledge to use when I begin work.