If I had to use one word to describe my experience on my summer placement, it would be *intense*. It was an enriching, but challenging experience that tested my character and knowledge. I did my placement with *Sharklab*, a Maltese NGO founded by Greg Nowell, dedicated to the conservation of Maltese and Mediterranean elasmobranchs. The organisation is run with the help of different Sharklab members, and eager interns looking to gain experience.

My project consisted of identifying all the species of batoids (rays and skates) in the coast of Malta. Given that there’s very little literature on Maltese batoids yet, it’s quite a huge start! So basically my role was to do the explorer’s job and visit different sites in the search of diverse aggregation sites of rays and skates. Not as easy as it
sounds. Especially if you haven’t experienced the Maltese public transport. But I was rewarded with diving at some spectacular’s spots most people would pay to visit.

As if that hadn’t kept me active enough, my stay with Sharklab was filled with extracurricular activities. This included doing studies on the conservation of sharks, rays and skates; shark recovery programs; and education/awareness activities.

Research activities included a chumming session, weekly visits to the fishmarket, and two night snorkelling sessions. The chumming session was done in the open sea, where we put 5 different tubes to attract sharks, each tube full of fish fat, blood and rotten meat (chum). Beautiful stuff. Though we didn’t see any sharks, we did see a cute Loggerhead turtle up close!

The night snorkels were done in the northwest of the island. The experience is surreal: guiding yourself in the dark with nothing but a torch light, with a feeling as if you were floating in space. Everything seems just more grotesque, yet beautiful than in the sunlight. Some cool marine life you can see in Malta include octopuses, cuttlefish and different rays and skates.

The fishmarket sessions consisted of going very early in the morning to monitor the elasmobranch landings. There you could feel in awe of all the impressive, weird things that live in the Mediterranean, and some nights we were lucky (though it’s not very good news for the environment) enough to see big species of sharks being landed.

And I was also able to participate in Sharklab’s most ambitious project: the shark recovery program. Eggcases from Small Spotted Catsharks (Scyliorhinus canicula) and Nursehounds (Scyliorhinus
*stellaris*) are taken from caught pregnant sharks in the fish market, and put into tanks in Sharklab’s headquarters. There they are taken care of until they hatch. If they do, they are fed and nursed until they are big enough to be released to the wild, sweet wild. So far Sharklab’s efforts have been successful enough to have release more than 100 sharks in just a couple of years! That’s not too shabby! So my summer placement was a busy time full of work, lessons, excitement, and adventure, all at the same time that I adapted to a new country with a different culture, and a house with very particular rules. It was certainly a challenge, but I’m glad to say I passed and enjoyed through and through.

Dedication to our cause! No time to fool around! (picture taken by Caroline Gittins)