This summer I spent ten amazing weeks on the beautiful island of St. Eustatius in the Dutch Caribbean. Nestled between the islands of Saba and St Kitts, and only a 17-minute flight away from St. Martin, this small island was an amazing place to carry out my summer placement. The scenery above and below the water is incredible! This is mainly due to the volcanic nature of the island, with an extinct volcano in the south and a dormant volcano (the quill) in the north that towers above the island. Underwater lava fingers spread across the seabed, which have been colonized by corals, sponges and gorgonians over many years.

I worked with the St. Eustatius National Park Authority (STENAPA), the brilliant NGO that works tirelessly to better the environment around the island. My project took place within the marine park, which surrounds the island, trying to assess the effectiveness of two no take zones, and whether they have had a
positive effect upon fish abundance and diversity over the years. I assessed 17 
sites that had previously been surveyed twice before, allowing me to compare 
my data against subsequent years. Even before I had analyzed my data it was 
clear to see that the waters around this island were particularly abundant, a 
statement that cannot be said too often for many other Caribbean islands.

In addition to carrying out my project, I got a lot of hands on experience working 
alongside the marine park ranger everyday. This involved maintaining, cleaning 
and replacing mooring lines within the marine park, lionfish culling and helping 
out on other research projects. I have to admit lionfish culling was my favorite 
task, due to the fact they taste lovely! Furthermore, STENAPA has a lot of 
outreach programs, trying to teach the local residents the importance of the 
environment. I was involved with the kids club that ran for two weeks during my
stay, doing snorkel excursions with the children. It was great seeing their faces light up, as some of them had never snorkeled before!

Overall, this summer placement has been an amazing experience. I have gained so much experience and so many invaluable skills that will stand me in good stead as I move forward in my career. I have also met so many different people, which only added to the experience, and would just like to thank everyone who lent a hand in anyway shape or form.