



Scallop Diving in the Firth of Lorn

There I was, sat on a boat in the Firth of Lorn, surrounded by curious seals and flocks of sea birds in one of the most beautiful places on the planet.

“You were meant to come here to witness all this abundance,” said Dirk, the scallop diver I went fishing with. Liam, his boat captain, nodded in agreement as he graded scallops for sale. I was too awestruck to reply, but I couldn’t believe my good fortune. I couldn’t believe that I had secured a summer placement at the Scottish Association for Marine Sciences (SAMS). This was why I was out here on a boat, where Dirk just happened to be fishing in the middle of a colony of seals, near islands teeming with birds! I had a fascinating project, which entailed photographing and measuring the king scallop *Pecten maximus* to compare its growth in the Firth of Lorn and surrounding waters. My favorite part of the project was fishing with Dirk and Liam. Every time Dirk was underwater, Liam would sing about his love for the sea and for scallops in particular.



Upper valve of the King scallop ↑



Lower valve of the King scallop ↑

*Liam and Dirk on the RIB. This was after two dives on the last day I went fishing with them.
Look at all those scallops in the front of the boat!*



My experience working in coastal fisheries along the south east coast of India was nothing like this. Fisheries resource conflicts are very real and transcend caste, gear and catch within each fishing community. So watching Dirk kit up, dive, and land some of the biggest scallops I had ever seen was surreal. Dirk practiced conservation while fishing; he never landed the small scallops, even when they qualified the minimum legal limit. Along the south east coast of India, letting the smallest fish go meant missing a meal if not more. The contrasting realities made me recognize the value of protected areas, well managed fisheries and above all, conscientious fishers.



Dirk ready to dive ↑



↑ Dirk and Liam hauling the bag of scallops onto the boat

Liam grading the scallops collected by Dirk ↓↓



Dirk relaxing after a dive ↓↓



Of course, I couldn't stay out on the boat as much I wanted, given all the requisite data was collected in about 7 days. I had to get back to the lab and start the next most exciting part of my project: Bayesian modeling! This was not covered as part of the Stats course and so I devoted myself to learning it and understanding how I would model the von Bertalanffy growth curve (fisheries biologists love this model!) using Bayesian techniques. This became the most consuming part of my project – turns out that going out fishing was only the beginning of a terrific two-month placement.

SAMS was an exciting place to be especially since it was located in Oban, one of the most beautiful parts of Scotland. There were so many opportunities to participate in field research and I attended some great talks. While my project was very demanding physically (place a tropical girl in a temperate climate!) and mentally (all that Bayesian stats!), I did manage to go out looking for jellyfish and non-native species on two separate projects. I also assisted my supervisor, Dr. Fox for a day, assessing survival rates of *Nephrops* after trawling. Perhaps the most exciting part for me was getting to meet other scallop divers and learning more about the scallop dive fisheries. I met some wonderful people over my placement in Scotland and will always remember Liam fondly, singing songs about his love for the sea and the King scallop.



Scallops I photographed and measured ↑

↑ *Liam showing me one of the biggest scallops landed that day*



The RIB with Dirk and Liam