

Jim Labisko
Evolution 2017, Portland Oregon, United States

Thanks to the generous support of The Royal Society of Biology, in June this year I attended Evolution 2017 in Portland Oregon; a conference I have been wanting to experience for a number of years.

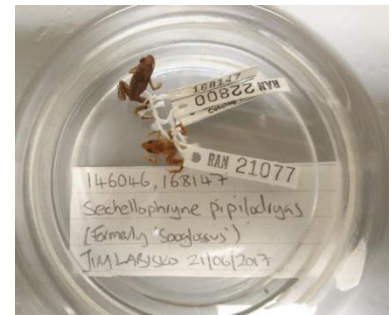
On the morning of the first full day of talks, I presented the most recent developments arising from my research on the evolutionary relationships of sooglossid frogs.



One of the world's most range-restricted anurans, the entire family (the Sooglossidae) consists of two genera, each with just two species, which are found on only three islands in the Seychelles archipelago (western Indian Ocean). These frogs are highly threatened, and also recognised as evolutionarily distinct and globally endangered (EDGE) species by the Zoological Society of London. My work on this unique group investigates the evolutionary relationships between populations of the four species across the islands of Mahé, Silhouette, and Praslin, with further key outputs that are informing and establishing appropriate monitoring and conservation action.

My attendance over the week-long conference enabled me to meet with key collaborators to discuss further work on the Sooglossidae, and also wider amphibian taxonomy and phylogenetics, the results of which are due to be published later this year.

In addition to my attendance at Evolution, the support of the RSB enabled me to visit the state-of-the-art collections facility of the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology (UMMZ), which holds over 400,000 herpetological specimens, including the largest collection of sooglossid specimens in the world. A key aim here was to assess whether any examples of *Sechellophryne pipilodryas* (Gerlach & Willi, 2002), the most recently described sooglossid, and sister species to one of the world's smallest terrestrial vertebrates, *S. gardineri* (Boulenger, 1911), were held within the collection. The last examples of *S. gardineri* were obtained in the 1970s and early 1980s, and as the *Sechellophryne* frogs are morphologically similar, I hypothesised that within the UMMZ collection some *S. pipilodryas* may have been collected with, and identified as *S. gardineri* from the island of Silhouette, where they co-occur.



As a result of my investigation, I identified two specimens of *S. pipilodryas* within the UMMZ collection – much to the appreciation of the herpetological curator! Crucially, the museum now holds important reference examples of all recognised species of sooglossid.

In short, the Early Career MRSB Travel Grant not only provided me the opportunity to attend and present at an international conference, it also facilitated greater collaborative efforts between myself and key researchers in amphibian systematics and taxonomy, and has undoubtedly assisted me in developing and maintaining new and productive relationships, for which I am especially grateful.

...I also caught my first ever catfish!

Jim Labisko
August 2017

References and further reading:

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<http://www.edgeofexistence.org/amphibians/default.php>

Gerlach, J. & Willi, J. (2002) A new species of frog, genus *Sooglossus* (Anura, Sooglossidae) from Silhouette Island, Seychelles. *Amphibia-Reptilia*, **23**, 445-458.

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<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/collections/zoology-collections/herpetology-collections.html>

Nussbaum, R.A. (1984) Amphibians of the Seychelles. *Biogeography and ecology of the Seychelles Islands* (ed. by D.R. Stoddart), pp. 379-415. W. Junk, The Hague; Boston: Hingham, Massachusetts, USA.

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