

Erasmus+ Traineeship Experience Report

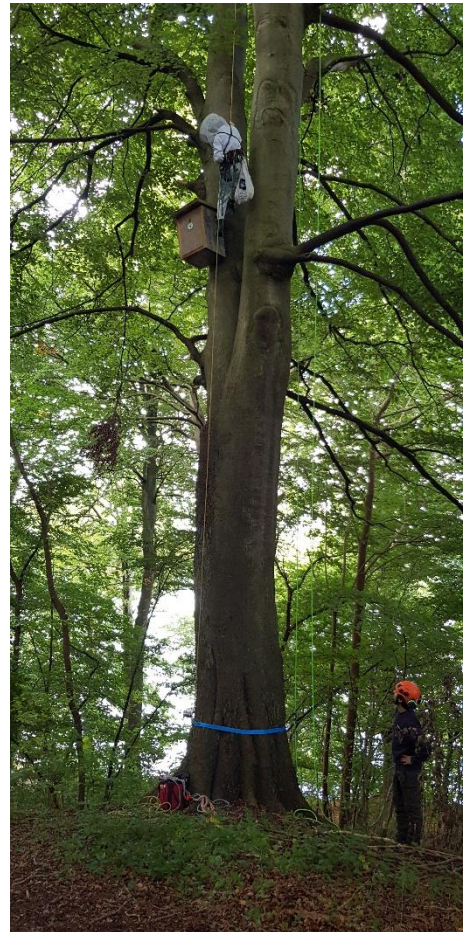
Preparation

My Erasmus+ traineeship in Denmark was closely connected to my Master's thesis project. The opportunity arose through academic contacts and discussions about potential research topics in conservation biology and entomology. The project focuses on the endangered saproxylic beetle *Gnorimus nobilis* and investigates the use of artificial nest boxes compared to natural tree cavities as breeding habitats. The project itself was initiated by the Copenhagen Zoo, which installed the artificial nest boxes in the field. My academic supervision during the traineeship took place at the Zoological Museum of the University of Copenhagen.

Once the traineeship was confirmed, the main challenge during the preparation phase was finding accommodation. Copenhagen is known for its high housing costs, and it quickly became clear that living directly in the city would be difficult within the typical budget of the Erasmus+ grant. After some searching, I decided to live in Frederikssund, a smaller town outside Copenhagen.

I found accommodation on a small farm. At first, I stayed there through a Workaway arrangement in order to keep the rent more affordable. During the more stressful phase of writing my Master's thesis, I later switched to renting a room. Living on the farm was a wonderful experience. I had the opportunity to live close to nature, surrounded by chickens, cows, horses, cats, and dogs. I am also very grateful to have met my landlords, who turned out to be wonderful people and have since become friends.

The housing search required patience and flexibility, but in the end the solution worked very well. Public transport in Denmark is very reliable, which made commuting manageable. Overall, the preparation phase mainly consisted of organising accommodation, travel arrangements, and coordinating the start of the project with my supervisor.



Daily Live

During the traineeship I worked primarily at the Zoological Museum of the University of Copenhagen, where my supervisor provided me with a workspace and supported the analytical part of my Master's thesis. A particularly valuable aspect of working at the museum was the presence of many specialists in entomology. Being surrounded by researchers with different taxonomic expertise allowed me to ask questions, discuss identification challenges, and gain insights into various aspects of insect biodiversity research.

My main tasks involved analysing the contents of artificial nest boxes and comparing them with material from natural tree cavities. These structures serve as important habitats for saproxylic beetles and other organisms that depend on decaying wood. A large part of my daily work consisted of sorting and morphologically identifying collected specimens using taxonomic keys and scientific literature. This process required careful observation and patience, but it also helped me significantly improve my taxonomic skills.

Fieldwork was another important component of the project. The artificial nest boxes had been installed by the Copenhagen Zoo as part of a conservation initiative for *Gnorimus nobilis*. Visiting these sites and collecting samples helped me better understand the ecological context of the study and the practical challenges involved in conservation-oriented research.

Although the molecular analyses of the samples were conducted externally using DNA metabarcoding, I was involved in preparing and organising the specimens for shipment. This gave me insight into how classical morphological identification and modern molecular techniques can complement each other in biodiversity research.

The supervision during my traineeship was supportive and constructive. My supervisor was available for discussions and provided guidance when needed, while also allowing me to work independently on my project. In addition, the other researchers at the museum were very open and helpful whenever I encountered difficulties with species identification.

Fortunately, I did not experience any major conflicts during my traineeship. Most challenges were related to practical aspects such as organising fieldwork, managing the daily commute from Frederikssund, or dealing with particularly difficult species identifications. These challenges were usually solved through discussions with colleagues or by consulting additional literature. The language barrier was also not an issue, as Danes generally speak excellent English. In my experience, it does not matter whether you are in the countryside or speaking with people from the older generation.

Outside of work, I enjoyed exploring Denmark and Copenhagen. Even though I lived outside the city, the train connection allowed me to visit Copenhagen regularly after work or on weekends. The city offers many cultural and historical attractions, and I especially enjoyed spending time in parks, museums, and of course trying various typical Danish foods such as *Smørrebrød*. Fortunately, the Danes also have good bread! 😊

Living abroad gave me the opportunity to experience everyday Danish culture and lifestyle. For example, I joined a climbing club during my stay. In addition, I loved spending time taking long walks with my landlords' dog.



Living in Denmark also meant adapting to a different cost of living. Denmark is known for being an expensive country, and this was especially noticeable when it came to everyday expenses such as groceries. While the Erasmus grant was very helpful, careful budgeting was still necessary. Eating out in restaurants or cafés was therefore something I did only occasionally, as it would have quickly exceeded my budget.

Because of this, much of my free time was spent in simple but very enjoyable ways. I spent a lot of time outdoors and often helped with small

tasks on the farm where I lived. This gave me the opportunity to experience rural Danish life and enjoy the surrounding nature. Being able to spend time outside and work with animals after a day of academic work was a very pleasant balance to the more analytical parts of my project.

Another aspect that made my stay particularly enjoyable was that Denmark is relatively close to my home country. Several friends were able to visit me during my stay, which allowed me to show them Copenhagen and the surrounding areas. Sharing these experiences made the time abroad even more memorable.

Copenhagen is also well known as a very bicycle-friendly city. Cycling is an important part of everyday life there, and during my stay I often used a bike to explore the city and nearby areas. This made it easy to move around and also allowed me to experience the city in a more local and authentic way.

Evaluation

Overall, my Erasmus traineeship was a very valuable experience both academically and personally. One of the best aspects of the traineeship was the opportunity to work in such a stimulating scientific environment. The Zoological Museum provided access to knowledgeable researchers and an atmosphere that encouraged discussion and learning. Being able to interact with experts in entomology and biodiversity research greatly enriched my Master's thesis project.

Another highlight was gaining practical experience in ecological fieldwork and morphological species identification. Working directly with specimens and learning how to identify different species helped me develop important skills that are essential in biodiversity research.

One of the more challenging aspects of the traineeship was the daily commute from Frederikssund to Copenhagen. While public transport was reliable, commuting required good time management and occasionally made the working day longer. However, living outside the city was necessary from a financial perspective, and overall the arrangement worked very well for me.

In conclusion, the traineeship provided valuable insights into conservation research and strengthened my interest in working with insect biodiversity and ecological communities. The experience also helped me develop greater independence, adaptability, and confidence in my scientific work. I would highly recommend participating in an Erasmus traineeship to other students, as it offers the opportunity to gain international experience, develop professional skills, and work in a stimulating academic environment.

From a personal perspective, one of the best aspects of my stay was the opportunity to combine academic work with a very unique living environment. Living on a farm close to nature while simultaneously conducting research in a renowned scientific institution created a very special balance between academic and everyday life. I particularly appreciated the supportive atmosphere at the museum and the willingness of many researchers to share their expertise and help with species identification. These interactions greatly contributed to my learning experience and made the traineeship both intellectually stimulating and enjoyable.

At the same time, the financial aspect of living in Denmark was one of the biggest challenges during my stay. The high cost of living, especially for accommodation and groceries, required careful planning and sometimes meant making compromises in everyday life. However, this

challenge also helped me develop better budgeting skills and adapt to living abroad in a practical way.

Looking back, these challenges were manageable and ultimately part of the learning experience of living and working in another country. I would definitely do it again! 😊

