

Alana Alexander

BSc (Hons) Biological Science

I've had a life time interest in marine animals, brought about through spending too much time wading through rockpools as a kid, watching dolphin movies and visiting SeaWorld as a child. I made sure I took as many marine biology papers as possible at undergraduate level and wanted to continue with these studies after graduation.

My Honours research focuses on genetic diversity among pilot whales. Pilot whales are thought to live in family pods, determined by the maternal line. My research looked at whether strandings of pilot whales have an effect on the genetic diversity of the whale population or whether it's a natural phenomenon that has no real effect on the population.

In 2007, I was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship, which provides tuition and living costs for three years of study at a US university, along with an allowance for

books, equipment and conference attendance. I'm hoping to study in Oregon, where my Honours supervisor has relocated to, and investigate changes in the genetic diversity and population size of sperm whales brought about by whaling and other factors.

Studying at The University of Auckland provided me with numerous opportunities. As part of the BSc, there are multiple chances to go on field trips, particularly to the marine laboratory at Goat Island. The lecturers are all experts in their fields, and can give you valued insight into how research is conducted and the new findings coming out in their area of science.

The BSc gave me the motivation to continue my education and my Honours project has given me a taste of marine research. I'm hoping that one day I'll be able to inspire my own students the same way I've been inspired.

