



WIKO AS A CATALYST GREGORY ALBERY

Greg Albery was born in 1994 in Taunton, Somerset, UK. He studied Biological Sciences at Keble College, Oxford, where he specialised in ecology, immunology, and disease biology and then received a PhD in Evolutionary Biology from the University of Edinburgh. After the pandemic shook up his academic career, he has been based between a number of institutions including Georgetown University, the Universities of Edinburgh and Oxford, and the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB) in Berlin. In his time as a disease ecologist, he has worked on ants, badgers, red deer, great tits, wild-fires, and climate change, among other topics. Currently, he specialises in unifying spatial and social network approaches to studying disease dynamics, with a view to understanding and predicting how behaviour and the environment drive infection in wildlife and humans. During his time at the Wissenschaftskolleg, he worked on understanding how population density affects disease transmission, writing reviews, and consolidating meta-datasets of wild animal data. – Address: Department of Biology, Georgetown University, Washington, DC 20057, USA. E-mail: gfalbery@gmail.com.

My six months at Wissenschaftskolleg were transformative. In a series of interwoven work-related and personal developments, I emerged in a very different position in July 2022 than the one I arrived in in January.

Early on in my fellowship, I fell in love with Berlin. The size and energy of the city, its ethos and its culture all enraptured me and I ended up very rapidly (within a couple of weeks) deciding I wanted to stay past my time at Wiko. I spent my time wandering through Grunewald, cycling in the sun through the streets, and escorting groups of

visiting friends around the sights. Over the course of the six months, I had a dozen visitors and managed to draw them into the same love of the city, through a combination of museum visits, street art tours, cycles around Tempelhofer Feld, and *Späti* beers. I've learned a good bit of German via osmosis from the Fellows, my Berlin friends, and the surroundings, and I've really enjoyed the process of picking up phrases and deciphering the grammar rules as time goes on.

Wiko itself was another huge part of my enjoyment of this year. Although my six-month stint was hamstrung by a couple of extended Covid-related quarantines (including two weeks of my own first experience with the virus), I settled quickly into life there. As well as being involved in some scintillating conversations with the other Fellows, I engaged in some once-in-a-lifetime activities. I ended a decade-long abstinence from acting, reading a part in Mohammad Al Attar's play as part of his colloquium. I DJ'ed the farewell party in an ostentatious pink suit, I got gleefully rejected from Berghain with two other Fellows, and I had many drinks on the terrace at the back of Villa Walther (which we erroneously christened "The Pontoon," to split scorn and enthusiasm). I watched dozens of fascinating colloquia on all sorts of topics I'd never have had a chance to learn about. The fellowship delivered on its promise of "Time to Think" and was perfectly timed for me personally as an opportunity to emotionally and academically reset and get over the last couple of years of pandemic, split across three countries. The whole staff was delightful and extraordinarily helpful and directly led me to extend my visa and stay in Berlin. I have never eaten, drank, and lived so well.

Having arrived in the dead of winter to some minor lockdowns gave me a good opportunity to get some work done before the sun arrived. On the research front, I fulfilled my aim of consolidating and integrating a series of collaborations with researchers distributed across a few dozen institutions worldwide. I've collated datasets on behaviour and infection on a wide distribution of wild animals, spanning insects, sharks, bony fish, mammals, birds, and reptiles. The procedure was really successful and thought-provoking, and I am looking forward to continuing to analyse the data for a number of different purposes and hopefully produce a paper or two with an egregiously long co-author list. I also wrote a few long reviews during my time here, allowing me to organise my thoughts on social and spatial behaviour and their interactions with disease dynamics.

When I arrived, I had no precise plans for my life after the end of the six months, so I also had to go about getting a job lined up during my time here. I applied for several fellowships and grants and spent a substantial amount of time interviewing for them.

Ultimately, I was awarded a few of the grants, including two through Georgetown University and one through the University of Edinburgh. The consortium of researchers I co-founded, the viral emergence research initiative (VERENA), was awarded a grant by the NSF to establish an Institute at Georgetown. As well as being a useful time to take to think and write grant proposals, the advice of more experienced Wiko Fellows was incredibly useful in guiding me through the process and giving me tips for the future. A few of the Fellows also participated in a mock interview for me, grilling me on the intricacies of my work and sorting out my presenting style. I also got the opportunity to present my work to several European institutions, including the Humboldt-Universität, the Freie Universität, and the University of Zurich. These combined serendipitously with my desire to stay in Berlin beyond the end of my Wiko fellowship, leading to me securing a guest researcher position at the Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB).

All in all, it was a wonderful six months whose memories I will cherish. The time left an indelible mark on my career and personal development, and without Wiko I am certain my life would turn out very differently. These days, I occasionally cycle around Grunewald and wander around the same paths and remember the time I spent there.