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Country of Origin: New Zealand

Finished SIA: Summer Semester 2017

PhD Studies: Functional and genomic characterisation of the hatchability in Naked Neck chicken at Georg-August University, Started March 2018, expected finish March 2021.

Before coming over to Germany, I remember a lot of people telling me how difficult it would be and how many problems I would have studying overseas, not just as an exchange student, but for my complete Masters. Looking back at that time now, I am glad I chose to ignore them! SIA gave me some wonderful learning experiences, including the excursion to Costa Rica, and set me up well to start a PhD at the university too. The diversity of the program led me to be able to choose modules that I was most interested in, and would help me to move in the direction I wanted to (even though I was not 100% certain what I would do after SIA when I started). Upon completing SIA, and enjoying the celebrations involved with receiving my Master's Degree, I began looking into options for doing a PhD. One day, I received an email from a friend of mine who started SIA with me telling me to take a look at this posting for a PhD position, as he thought it sounded like something I would really like. After going through the application and interview process, I was very excited to receive my position at the University, and was ecstatic that I would be able to stay in the city of Göttingen, in which I have found my home away from New Zealand.

My project involves research into the Naked Neck gene in chickens, which, as the name suggests, causes a lack of feather growth in the neck, along with reduced feathering in the body. Due to the lack of feathering, birds with these genes have a greater tolerance to warmer climates, along with improved production and reproductive performance, which is of interest within tropical countries and also with raising climate temperatures. We are interested in the hatching rate of chickens with this gene, as there is a reduction in the hatching rate seen with the occurrence of this gene, however the reason for this reduced hatching rate is unknown. Our goal is to look into reduction in the hatching rate through differential temperatures during hatching, along with molecular and genetic testing in the hope of finding the cause, or hopefully reducing the number of late embryonic deaths that occur, leading to the reduced hatching rate. In working on this project, I am privileged to be able to work with animals, in a laboratory, and also learn a lot about computer programming to analyse the genetic data we will receive. Along with the work on my project, I have so far been able to also give lectures, improving my teaching abilities, and take part on some excursions and conferences, for example the DGfZ Conference which was held in Bonn in September 2018. I am looking forward to working further on my PhD, and am not exactly certain as to in which direction I will head in once I am finished, but am looking forward to finding out.