



Food for Thought: Eastern Threat Center Interns Gain and Give

by Stephanie Worley Firley

In science classes, students learn about mutualism—a beneficial interaction between two species, such as that between a bee and a flower. The bee, in search of pollen and nectar, pollinates the flower that is host to the bee's search. Students majoring in natural sciences as well as forestry, Geographic Information Systems (GIS), mass communications, and more are playing a key role in a similarly mutualistic relationship as interns with the Eastern Forest Environmental Threat Assessment Center.

University partnerships and programs make the internships possible for a diverse group of students. In 2012, student interns came from near and far and represent many schools— Inter American University of Puerto Rico, North Carolina Central University, North Carolina State University, University of North Carolina Asheville, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, and University of Texas-Pan American. With a range of backgrounds and skillsets, student interns support a variety of projects to develop tools and outreach materials that assist with managing forest resources facing a variety of stressors. As they learn new skills and gain important work experience, their curiosity and enthusiasm creates a meaningful experience for them as well as Center scientists and staff. Center Director Danny Lee says, “We welcome the opportunity to bring students on board throughout the year. The exposure to Forest Service research and communication processes helps to prepare them for the real world and in turn enriches our program.”

Eastern Threat Center resource information specialists Jennifer Moore Myers and Erika Cohen have worked closely with many student interns, some of whom have continued to work with the Center as university cooperators or staff. “The experience has always been mutually beneficial – exposure for them, assistance for us. In addition, we all become better science communicators as we explain the what, how, and why of our research to



Eastern Threat Center interns learned about research activities and met scientists on staff during a tour of the Biodiversity Laboratory at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences Nature Research Center. Pictured from left to right: Jennifer Moore Myers, Michelle Trautwein (Assistant Director, Biodiversity Laboratory), Erika Cohen, Zach DeGraffenreid (North Carolina Central University), and Erik Martinez (University of Texas-Pan American).

the students,” says Moore Myers. Cohen says, “As the season/semester progresses, we see the students take on more responsibility, and in turn, gain confidence. They all express the value of the internship (and internships in general) as a guidepost for their career paths. And we receive fresh ideas, energy, and perspective as we provide mentoring and professional experience to qualified, motivated students.”

For student interns, the Eastern Threat Center is just one “flower” they’ll visit along their journey, but, like the bee, they leave behind a significant contribution. “Overall, it’s inspiring to see the next generation of natural resource stewards gain a greater understanding of our agency’s work and discover how they can contribute to the important research we do,” says Moore Myers.

Meet some of the Eastern Threat Center interns and read their reflections on their internship experiences at <http://www.forestthreats.org/about/who-we-are/interns>.