USU Blanding Student Completes Berryman Institute Internship

01/14/2019

Utah State University Blanding graduate Joel Charles spent his summer in Georgia after receiving the Berryman Institute Summer Internship. The institute’s internship allowed Joel to work with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Wildlife Service and gain hands-on experience with several wildlife projects throughout Georgia.

Joel has been interested in wildlife and animals throughout his life, and plans to become a veterinary doctor. The opportunity to spend two months directly involved with fieldwork and wildlife issues provided many valuable lessons and experiences to Joel, and has strengthened his plans to pursue his career at a veterinarian.

Upon arriving in Georgia, he was immediately tasked with assisting with the time-sensitive project of catching and relocating Canada Geese, who have become a nuisance in the area. Joel’s arrival coincided with the goose’s molting season, a time when they shed and regrow their feathers, which allowed the geese to be caught more easily. Captured geese were tagged and recorded, allowing their movements to be tracked and monitored over time.

Another project Joel worked on involved an animal also causing problems in Georgia: feral swine. The swine, a non-native species introduced centuries ago, are a significant problem to farmers and landowners, destroying crops and digging up vegetation looking for food. After locating a group of swine with trail cameras, feeders were put into place to attract the pigs, followed by traps to capture the swine. Once in captivity the swine were tested for several diseases, and euthanized.

Joel was impressed by the professionals he worked with from the USDA, and their eagerness to help him learn about the projects he assisted with, and also to make sure he knew why the projects mattered. He also noted that safety was always a top concern, and the methods they employed for tracking, trapping, and working with the animals were always very methodical and safe.

“Working with the USDA gave me a lot of new experiences I never thought I would have, working with all kinds of wildlife on different projects, and experiencing a new part of the country,” said Joel of the internship. “The people I worked with made sure I was able to experience as much as possible, even attending USDA conferences and research presentations in addition to the field work.”

A favorite part of his time in Georgia was traveling to St. Simmons Island for a raccoon relocation project to help protect sea turtle nests. The island has a resident 14-foot alligator named Norm, who is a popular attraction to visitors. Joel also spent some time working on Warner Robbins Air Force Base, working to control wildlife around the runways and potentially dangerous areas of the base.

“I learned there are a lot of different aspects to working with wildlife, lots of projects and studies you might never think of, but that are important to maintaining a healthy population of wildlife and balance with people,” commented Charles on the benefits of the internship.

After completing the summer internship Joel returned to school at Utah State University, but transitioned from the Blanding campus to the Logan campus to enroll in the veterinary science program. His plan is to complete the program through a partnership with Washington State University and USU, allowing students in Utah to complete a portion of their veterinary education in Utah while paying in-state tuition, before finishing the program in Washington.

See also:

USU Department of Animal, Dairy and Veterinary Sciences Berryman Institute Internships