When he’s not traveling to the Dominican Republic, Belize, or sites across Virginia as a project supervisor and research associate at the college’s Conservation Management Institute, graduate student Michael St. Germain may be found painting a mural along Blacksburg’s Draper Road. The first in a series of town-commissioned wall paintings aimed at beautifying downtown, St. Germain’s work depicts a riparian scene teeming with fish, birds, mammals, cattails, black-eyed susans, and redbuds.

“‘It’s a water-quality awareness painting,’ St. Germain explained. ‘Stroubles Creek runs almost directly underneath the site. The mural shows how the location would look if Blacksburg hadn’t been built over it.’ St. Germain will identify the plants and animals in the mural to increase its educational value.

This is not the only piece of St. Germain’s art to beautify Blacksburg; his four HokieBird statues grace the community as part of the Blacksburg Partnership for Gobble De Art program. ‘Hokie Stone,’ voted best statue by the Roanoke Times, stands outside the University Mall, while ‘Hokie Kopia’ occupies Squires Student Center. ‘Gentleman’s Manor’ resides at the German Club’s manor house on Southgate Drive. ‘Hyer A. Hokie,’ created in the likeness of Virginia Tech alumnus Garnett Smith, stands inside the Smith Career Center and appeared on the cover of the university’s 2010-11 Career Planning Guide.

Another major display of St. Germain’s artistic talent, which he honed while studying fine art at Syracuse University, made its debut in July in A Field Guide to the Nature of Primland and the Blue Ridge Mountains (see related story on page 1). St. Germain co-authored the 145-page guide with Scott Klopfer, executive director of the Conservation Management Institute, and created 130 detailed illustrations of flora and fauna found at the 12,000-acre Primland Resort near Meadows of Dan, Va.

St. Germain, who earned his bachelor’s in wildlife biology from the university of Rhode Island and expects to complete his master’s in wildlife science in December, likes to joke about his circuitous career path: “I found out it was difficult to make a living in art, so I got a degree in wildlife biology, where making a living is also challenging. I increased my chances by combining the two.”

He is currently conducting research on the diversity and habitat use of bats, birds, and amphibians. An institute employee since 2001, St. Germain has worked in remote locations in Alaska, Arkansas, new England, Peru, and nepal, to name a few. Work on carbon offsets projects have kept him shuttling back and forth between Blacksburg and the jungles of Belize for the past two years. “I’m addicted to adventure,” he says.


St. Germain’s mural on Draper Road in Blacksburg (left and above) depicts a riparian scene teeming with plants and animals.

St. Germain’s mural on Draper Road in Blacksburg (left and above) depicts a riparian scene teeming with plants and animals.


St. Germain has created four HokieBird statue designs (L-R): Gentleman’s Bird, Hokie Kopia, Hokie Stone, and Hyer A. Hokie.

Earth Week 2011
Over 70 students, faculty, and community members gathered to plant 25 native hardwood trees during one of the many Earth Week 2011 events on campus. (L-R) Janaki Alavalapati, head of the Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, Virginia Tech President Charles W. Steger, and Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources Doug Domenenech (’78 B.S. in forestry and wildlife) started things off with the planting of a ceremonial tree.