

Fisheries and Wildlife Graduate Students Earn Record Awards

With education funding exceedingly scarce, department head Eric Hallerman has strongly encouraged graduate students in fisheries and wildlife sciences to pursue outside funding sources. The efforts of a number of doctoral candidates, as well as the value and integrity of their research, have earned students an unprecedented number of prestigious honors in the past year.



Christine Bergeron was awarded a fellowship from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) National Center for Environmental Research as part of its Science to Achieve Results (STAR) program. The EPA STAR fellowship, which encourages promising students to obtain advanced degrees and pursue careers in environmentally related fields, will provide \$111,000 over a three-year period to cover tuition, stipend, and research expenses. Bergeron's dissertation research examines the effects of mercury on the reproductive success of adult American toads and development of their offspring from eggs through metamorphosis, and focuses on life history traits and responses to mercury that have implications for population size and sustainability.



Sarah DuRant received Grants-in-Aid Research awards from both Sigma Xi and the Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology for her research on wood ducks. Sigma Xi, a science research society, recognized DuRant for her research on immunological and energetic tradeoffs in young birds. The Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology awarded DuRant in the Comparative Physiology and Biochemistry division for her work titled "Slight changes in incubation temperature affect early growth and stress endocrinology in wood duck (*Aix sponsa*) ducklings."



Claudia Wultsch received a Kaplan Graduate Award (KAP) of \$24,900 from Panthera — Partners in Wild Cat Conservation for the second year in a row; she received \$18,500 in fall 2007. The KAP aims to support the next generation of wild cat biologists by recognizing the conservation efforts of graduate students studying wild cats in the field. Wultsch also received an \$8,000 International Peace Scholarship from the Philanthropic Educational Organization, which provides scholarships for international female students to pursue graduate study in the United States and Canada. Wultsch, originally

from Austria, came to the United States as a Fulbright Scholar. The funds will help cover the costs of her research and analysis on noninvasive monitoring (molecular scatology and remote camera trapping) of jaguars and other wild cats in Belize.



Maria Bravo-Vinaja also received an International Peace Scholarship of \$4,000 from the Philanthropic Educational Organization. Bravo-Vinaja used the scholarship to pay for tuition fees, books, and research equipment, which she says will help her succeed in her studies. Her main interest is studying the relationships between wildlife and habitat, especially those wildlife species of special concern. She has studied the use of habitat by the Mexican spotted owl in Mexico and now researches the landscape habitat relationship of golden eagles in northern Mexico using Geographic Information Systems to best predict where their highest quality habitat is located.



Jessica Homyack received a \$1,000 predoctoral scholarship from the Association for Women in Science. The scholarship, which is awarded on the national level to five to 10 female students per year, supports women in a science or engineering program, particularly in fields where women are underrepresented. Homyack's research focuses on the effects of forest regeneration methods on salamander populations in Virginia and West Virginia. She is examining the long-term effects of seven oak regeneration practices on salamander populations as part of a larger, multidisciplinary project that also considers effects to nutrient cycling and understory vegetation.



Danielle Bridgers was awarded a 2009 National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship. The fellowship, which recognizes masters and doctoral students who have done outstanding research in science or engineering, provides three years of funding, a tuition supplement, and a \$30,000 annual stipend. Bridgers researches bog turtles, an endangered species, and is the first person to successfully study this turtle species with sonar.