

An Adventure Worth Taking

Belize journey fuels research

Wednesday, April 19, 2017



STUDENTS IN BSCI 620 – GLOBAL SCIENCE EXPLORATIONS – SPENT SPRING BREAK STUDYING THE ECOSYSTEMS OF BELIZE.

Editor's Note: Biological sciences majors Elizabeth Pellerin '17, Juan Posada '17 and Anthony Santiesteban '18 presented their research on the biodiversity of birds in Punta Gorda, Belize, at UNH Manchester's poster session on Wednesday. The trio traveled to Belize with their Global Science Explorations class over spring break to study the country's biodiversity of species and ecosystems. Pellerin shares her experience here.

As a child growing up, I was always fascinated with wildlife and

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adventure.

I would watch the Discovery and National Geographic channels for hours on end. In fact, I still watch those channels today. I was excited when I heard about the Global Science Exploration course.

I thought, “How cool is that, to be able to learn about a country and then go explore all of its hidden treasures?” I’ve always wanted to travel and learn about different countries, and this opportunity seemed like the perfect fit for me.

Over spring break, I had the opportunity to study abroad in Belize, which is known for its grand biodiversity of species and ecosystems.

Before leaving for Belize, we learned about the biodiversity of birds, ecosystems, culture and agriculture of Belize. Each week, a new presenter came in to share their personal knowledge of the country.

Hearing their stories made me crave the moment when we would finally get to leave home and travel to there.

Belize was just breathtaking. Every way I turned, I was stunned with amazing views of the mountains, along with Belize’s beautiful landscape of flowers and trees. The weather was beautiful; most of the days were sunny with temperatures in the high 80s, and there was always a soft breeze.

During our journey, we explored three regions of Belize: Belmopan, Punta Gorda and Placencia. In Belmopan, we did a lot of bird-watching and hiking through the rainforest. We stayed at a



THE AUTHOR, ELIZABETH PELLERIN '17, AND ANTHONY SANTIESTEBAN '18, BOTH BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES MAJORS, EXPLORE THE BELIZEAN JUNGLE DURING A SURVIVAL TOUR IN PUNTA GORDA.

hotel called the Sleeping Giant Rainforest Lodge, named for the mountains that appear as if there was a giant peacefully sleeping there.

Punta Gorda was where I did my research for this course.

Juan Posada '17 and Anthony Santiesteban '18 were also in my group, and we called ourselves the Punta Gorda Trio. Our objective was to learn how to survive in the dense jungles of Belize.

The tour guides taught us about the appearances of medicinal plants, plants to be cautious about, how to make shelter and fire and what to eat and drink when surviving in the jungle. My favorite part was drinking from the water vine. It tasted so pure and full of minerals, I truly felt as if I was one with nature.

I also did something that I never thought in a million years I would do: I ate a parasite. It took so much courage for me to take that leap into trying something new, but I did it and I'm proud of it. Surprisingly, the parasite tasted minty. I was told that parasites are rich in protein and can act as an insect repellent if you eat a vast amount of them or crush them up in your hands and rub them onto your skin.

"My advice to students is to take advantage of the amazing opportunities UNH has to offer."

In Placencia, we were surrounded by miles upon miles of beaches. I was so happy to walk along the warm sandy beaches and take in the soft, golden horizon.

One day we took a boat to the coral reefs to learn about the diversity of coral and fish that live in this ecosystem. It was a lot of fun snorkeling through the coral, but using the flippers took some getting used to. It's not as easy as it looks! As we were swimming

around, we noticed a strangely familiar figure lurking below by the coral. It was a shark — 10 feet away from us. I was nervous, yet somewhat excited to see one this close. I was sure to be mindful of everything I have learned while watching Shark Week on the Discovery Channel.

This experience opened my perspective of the world around me. I learned a lot about myself, and I made many friends in the process. My advice to students is to take advantage of the amazing opportunities UNH has to offer. Go on new adventures, take risks and have an open mind, because in doing so, you can find the true you. As the saying goes, “The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page.”

Interested in conducting research abroad? The [UNH Hamel Center for Undergraduate Research](#) funds student research explorations on campus, in the United States, and across the world.

WRITTEN [Elizabeth Pellerin '17](#) | UNH Manchester

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