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When did you graduate from Oregon State and what was your specialization in?

I graduated from Oregon State University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences *Summa Cum Laude* in March, 2017. My specialization was Ecology and Conservation.

While an Ecampus student, what was your life like? (eg., family, job, life "balance" issues; what factors led you to consider a FW degree).

Prior to becoming an Ecampus student, I worked in the medical field while raising twin sons with my husband Ron and taking classes at a local community college. I also volunteered as a seasonal California least tern monitor with Point Reyes Bird Observatory (PRBO), a non-profit organization based out of Petaluma, CA. This volunteer work inspired me to move forward with my passion to pursue a career in wildlife conservation. After approximately 3 years of juggling parenting, work and education I received an Associate's degree in Biology and my sons graduated from high school. Though a milestone, I had not yet reached my final goal. I searched universities around the country offering online BS degrees related to wildlife conservation. Oregon State's F&W Program offered a diverse and interesting course curriculum that I felt would provide a well-rounded academic opportunity and jump start my new career. In 2012, my Ecampus journey began and took me from a career focused on helping humans in a controlled environment to a dynamic life of wildlife conservation in the natural world. It was an amazing academic experience that led me to my niche in life.

What did you do for an internship? Did your internship help with your current position?

Fortunately, my volunteer work with PRBO continued for 2 seasons and opened the door to a formal (paid) internship involving monitoring and research of seabird breeding and population dynamics. In conjunction with academics, this volunteer and internship opportunity allowed me to develop essential knowledge & skills that led to my current position and changed the trajectory of my professional path to a career in conservation science.

Where do you currently work and what is your job title?

I currently work for Point Blue Conservation Science (founded as PRBO) as a Coastal Program Biologist in my home town of Lompoc, CA. The Coastal Program is nested within the California Current Group of Point Blue.

What is a normal day of work like?

A typical day begins around 730am at our local office gathering all the necessary gear required for a day in the field. We cover large areas of dunes, sand sheets and 13+ miles of coastline on Vandenberg Air Force Base which requires driving and hiking out to established sites for monitoring. We constantly search for new nests, all known nests are checked 3 times a week and we opportunistically color band chicks at hatched nests. Although I assist with seabird transects and California least tern colony surveys, most of my work involves research and monitoring of the Western snowy plover. We typically have long days in the field, followed by data entry at the office. In the thick of plover breeding season, days can be 10-12 hours long depending on weather conditions, predator and trespass activity, and number of hatching nests.

How often do you work with animals (e.g., hands on, in the field, etc)?

The Western snowy plover breeding season runs from March 1st – September 30th. During this time, our team works in the field 5-6 days a week, depending on weather and the intensity of nesting activities. Each day involves working directly with wildlife in a pristine, coastal environment closed to the public (except for 3 beaches open to human use). We document all avian and terrestrial predators observed in nesting habitat, monitor plover activity (with binoculars and spotting scopes), keeping our distance in order to minimize disturbance. Nest searching/checks take up a large portion of our day which involves hiking 7-10 miles/day in coastal dune nesting habitat. We document all nests found and monitor them to hatch or failure. After hatching, we monitor snowy plover broods until fledging. We have 2 bird banders on our team and I often assist them with color banding broods. Banding allows us to follow the movement of these birds as fledglings and adults in order to gain insight on survival, movement and population demographics.

How often do you work in the office?

During the snowy plover breeding season, we work in the office a few hours a day after field work is completed to update our database with pertinent information that changes on a daily basis. Post-season office work includes minimal field work, data proofing and management, writing reports and protocols, all of which requires a good understanding of statistics.

What advice can you give to someone entering this field?

I would suggest securing a volunteer/internship position(s) before finishing a degree and job searching. First and foremost, this provides direction, and allows one to get a feel for their niche within the broad spectrum of wildlife careers available. Next, it offers an opportunity to apply current course lessons and knowledge gained, while in the field, which I found was an excellent learning tool. Finally, it can open doors to rewarding career paths, provide opportunity to demonstrate work ethic, knowledge, skills and abilities, in person; advantageous in such a competitive career field.

What do you find most rewarding?

The most rewarding aspect of my work is making a difference in the conservation of T&E species and overall biodiversity. Our conservative monitoring approach, although a disturbance to the plover population, provides critical information on population change and reproductive success. These data, along with our dedicated research on impacts of climate change and nesting response to restoration efforts, will continue to inform and guide snowy plover recovery management efforts for years to come. It's very rewarding to be part of such a great team of scientists striving to perpetuate common goals in conservation to ensure healthy, diverse wildlife populations and inform future efforts to combat climate change.

What do you find most challenging?

Obtaining funding for projects is very challenging given the current state of the federal administration. We are constantly seeking new and innovative ways to fund our current projects and expand our work to nearby communities. One of the most challenging aspects of my work is the lack of support and understanding from local communities, indicating a critical need for public education on wildlife conservation issues.

What do you enjoy when you are NOT working?

As a life-long advocate for personal health and fitness, outside of the field season I enjoy Pilates, yoga, hiking, gardening and birding. Also, my family, along with our beloved pets, enjoy camping excursions and traveling in search of quiet destinations and fascinating, natural beauty!