

CONSERVATION EDUCATION

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NEWSLETTER

SAN DIEGO ZOO
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AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS: THE TRAVELING CONSERVATION EDUCATION LAB

Earth Expeditions is a global conservation and education program through Project Dragonfly from Miami University in Ohio. Earth Expeditions offer a chance to travel to pivotal hotspots in Africa, Asia and the Americas to engage in inquiry and action projects on vital issues in conservation.

Through Earth Expeditions courses, the mission is to build an alliance of individuals with firsthand knowledge of inquiry-driven, community-based learning for the benefit of ecological communities, student achievement, and global understanding. During the summer of 2012, four of our staff were fortunate in having the opportunity to co-instruct one of these nine day field courses and facilitate a semester long web learning community.

Robin Keith and Corrin LaCombe traveled to Bahía de los Ángeles on the Baja peninsula of Mexico to instruct a course focused on learning and utilizing field methods as not only the basis of ecological research, but as a tool for participatory education, public engagement in science, and community-based environmental stewardship. A UNESCO World Heritage site and biosphere reserve, Bahía de los Ángeles is a unique ecoregion with remarkable marine and terrestrial (mainland and island) environments well suited to a broad range of studies. Among the highlights of this trip was snorkeling with whale sharks!

Samantha Young co-instructed a field course in the Tambopata National Reserve of the Peruvian Amazon, which focused on tropical biodiversity, avian ecology, and community-based conservation. Several days were spent at Inkaterra Research Center, where students worked together with community members and guides running the Center for Education, Science, and Conservation in Tambopata (CECCOT). Students participated in mist netting and visited a local primary school. One night was spent at a rural lodge run by a farming family within the buffer zone of the Tambopata reserve, giving first hand experience in the benefits and drawbacks of ecotourism. Several nights were spent at the Tambopata Research Center, run by the ecotourism and research organization, Rainforest Expeditions, where students visited the largest macaw clay lick in the world. Hundreds of bird species were also observed, numerous arthropods, many species of monkeys, and hundreds of plant species, among other tropical species.

Halfway across the world, Dr. James Danoff-Burg co-instructed a class on the island of Borneo with Woodland Park Zoo's Katie Remine. The course focused on scientific methods and primate conservation. Course participants spent several days living with rural Sabah families in homestays while collaborating with the Hutan Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Project. The remainder of the course was held at the Danau Girang Field Centre. Students greatly

improved their understanding of experimental design, data analysis, and overall experimental procedures – plus they saw 10 species of primates, Bornean pygmy elephants, Paper kite butterflies, Salt-water crocodiles, and gigantic caves with thousands of nesting bats and swiftlets. Students also wire-walked over rivers, assisted reforestation and environmental education efforts, spent joyous hours on numerous boats and perched on canopy platforms, and were able to work with and learn from rural Malaysians.

These unique teaching experiences will be instrumental in developing future Earth Expedition trips through San Diego Zoo Global, including a Hawaii course set to debut in the summer of 2013.

