

By: Samantha DiGiulio

Between visiting wolverine trap sites, Squaw Creek burn areas, and river restoration sites, the students at Pacific Biodiversity Institute, or PBI as it's called, have their hands full. From Austria to Spain to Columbia and all across the US, students have gathered at the North Cascades Basecamp to learn conservation and leadership skills, focusing on the ecology of the Methow Valley. Over the course of four weeks, students have the opportunity to get their hands dirty by participating in wetland surveys, bird surveys, amphibian sampling, small mammal sampling, and many more field activities.

Students attend class lessons and lectures from local wildlife professionals in many different areas of study. One lesson involved going out to a meadow with nets and catching native bees. There are more than 500 species of native bees in Washington, which was a surprising fact to many of the students. "Learning about native bees was really cool," said Elisabeth. "I liked frolicking in the meadow."

Between doing fieldwork and school work, students also get the opportunity to meet working professionals in wildlife related fields. When asked what she liked about the course, Valentina said, "We can meet different professionals in the fields and they give us insight into possible jobs." Several of the guest lecturers work for the U.S. Forest Service or with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. "It's a good experience to have because you discover what you like and what to expect for the future," says Valentina. Students also have the chance to interact with interns and learn about graduate school and work experience. "It's nice being around people who do the same work as you," said Erin.

It's not all work, however. On the weekends, students are free to explore the many wonders of the North Cascades area. Students have taken part in the Mazama World Famous Pancake Breakfast and Fun Run, hiked to Cutthroat Lake and Cedar Falls, and experienced white water rafting on the Methow River.

When asked what her favorite part of the course was, Erin replied, "Being out in the field and seeing wildlife. It's always nice seeing a grouse go Jurassic Park on you."

As the final week of the course winds down, students prepare to present their group projects. Over the past couple weeks, students have been gathering data on birds, plants, and mammals of the North Cascades Basecamp area. The objective of this activity is to create a report and present research, which is an integral part of scientific research.

As a student who is participating in the course, my favorite part has been meeting new people. Everyone here is from all over the world, and each person brings something different to the table. It is especially interesting learning about how policies and management practices are different in other countries, as well as learning that some things aren't really that different after all.

To learn more about PBI and the many opportunities it provides, visit [pacificbio.org](http://pacificbio.org).