

My internship took place at the Institute for Experimental Ecology at the University of Ulm from July 1 to September 30, 2008. I worked on a field based ecology project that investigated the life of edible dormice (*Glis glis*) with Tanja Weis-Dootz.

On my first day I was extremely nervous because field work was relatively new to me; however, Tanja took the time to teach me everything I needed to know about handling the animals and collecting data. During the time I worked with Tanja she encouraged me to ask questions, it did not matter if they were about the culture in Germany or about the project, she was always glad to answer them. I learned several new techniques that can be used when doing research in the field; I know that I will use this knowledge in my future work and education experiences. I found the project extremely interesting; everything about the edible dormouse was all new to me, I did not know what they were until I learned about the project. All the field data for the project is collected in the woods during the months of June and October when the edible dormice are active above ground and then lab research is done in the winter months. It is amazing seeing how the edible dormouse lived through the field work as well as reading papers that had been previously published to obtain more information. There was a significant difference in the eating habits of the edible dormice from the time they first appear to just before they enter their winter sleep; it was extremely interesting being able to see this throughout the months I was in Germany. Also learning how the reproduction varies from year to year depending on food availability; this year was a bad reproductive year compared to last. Not only did I learn that this, but Tanja also took the time to explain why this was occurring. The project focused on the edible dormouse; however, all aspects of the environment were involved and the knowledge I obtained from this will help me with future work.

A typical workday consisted of meeting Tanja at the University at 9:00 a.m. and then proceeding to one of four study sites surrounding Ulm. The four sites were located in the Botanical Garden, Söflingen, Beimerstetten, and Jungholtz; each site had its unique characteristics, however all consisted of mainly deciduous trees and were isolated patches. Each site contained about seventy nest boxes that hung three meters above the ground on trees distanced at thirty meters. Nest boxes at all sites were checked once a week for the presence of edible dormice. If an animal was found, it was first taken from the nest box and checked for a transponder and markings. If the animal had a transponder and/or markings it had been captured previously. A data sheet was filled out for each edible dormouse containing its sex, status (adult, subadult, or juvenile), weight, tibia length, and signs of sexual activity. If an animal did not have a transponder a passive transponder was injected just below the skin surface and it was then marked by clipping the ear (also used for genetic research) and cutting fur from the tail. The edible dormice were then returned to their nest box. The number of edible dormice found varied from site to site as well as from week to week. During the controls it was my responsibility to hold the edible dormouse.

The most memorable and amazing day of my internship was August 22, 2008. On this day we checked the nest control boxes in Beimerstetten, and the first young (pups) were seen. Six litters were found for a total of twenty-six pups. Two litters consisted of five pups and four of four pups; they ranged in age from zero days (born in the previous night) to ten days. Tanja would weigh, measure the tibia, and observe physical characteristics of the young while I held them and kept them warm. The physical characteristics changed quickly during the weeks, the fingers and toes separated, the ears opened, the eyes opened, fur appeared, the skin changed color, and teeth appeared. It was amazing being able to see how the edible dormouse developed from birth to its first winter sleep. More litters were found during the following weeks. I learned that they were extremely late in appearing because the first young are usually seen at the end of July, and the litters this year did not appear to be in as well shape as

in the previous year. Pups were only found in Beimerstetten; since I took great interest into why this was Tanja took the time to help me to collect data on food availability in the area and determine if it was a possible answer.

The time and effort put into this experience by everyone was amazing; thanks to them it was an extremely beneficial summer both academically and personally. I had the opportunity to spend time with Tanja at work as well as in social settings; it did not matter where we were, I always discovered something new. I have made good friends that I intend to stay in contact with and have learned a lot about opportunities that are available to me in the future.

“I agree that my report and accompanying pictures are used by the DAAD in printed materials, presentations and on the website in order to inform funding organizations, sponsors, and students about the RISE program.”