

**What aspects of this experience did you find valuable that you could only get abroad?**

I believe that learning and participating in the process of reintroducing captive wild animals back into the wild was a very valuable experience that you can only get abroad. It is rare to find organizations/programs that do this especially since the animal must be received/confiscated while they are still within their country of origin. Thus many of the animals that were being cared for at ARCAS that were intended to be reintroduced into the wild actually came from Guatemala. I also learned how complicated the process is not only in regards to how the animals must be rehabilitated but also the bureaucratic nuances required to release the animals. In addition, I learned a lot more about the illegal wildlife trade as it related to the native animals of Guatemala, which is something that I may not have learned the full extent of if I did not attend this program.

**Please provide feedback on the mentorship and experience provided by the onsite mentor(s).**

I believe their mentorship was extremely informative and valuable in relation to learning conservation medicine. I have learned more from them on the topic than in any of my classes I have taken in veterinary school. Their methods of teaching were also very helpful in providing me the critical information needed for each case and species that we worked with, without adding a lot of unnecessary information. I also appreciated the fact that they challenged us to think critically through each case as opposed to just giving us the answer. I also liked how hands-on the experience was because it made me much more confident in my ability to perform the skills that they taught us.

**Provide a BRIEF summary on a case that provided the best learning experience. Describe how your previous knowledge played a role in the experience, what new knowledge you acquired during the experience and if any prior knowledge would have been helpful.**

One of the best learning experiences I had involved a case where a parrot was found dead and a necropsy was need to determine cause and time of death. From the case I learned how to work with all of the provided information (not only form the necropsy but also from how, when and where the animal was found) to determine cause and time of death. With my previous understanding of physiology and pathology, I was able to deduce the time of death based on the animal's body temperature and rigidity, which relates to rigor mortis, as well as the presence of undigested food which composed food only given at a certain time of day. In regards to how the animal died this required knowledge of the species that I did not know which was that parrots will kill each other if they are trapped so that the squawking animal will not lure predators to them. This was exactly how the patient died and it demonstrated how important husbandry (which includes watching for animals in distress) is to preventing these cases from happening.

**Would you recommend this experience to other students? Please provide an explanation:**

I 100% would recommend this experience to other students especially if they are looking into working with exotics or wildlife. So far in my 2 ½ years of vet school this experience has been the most informative on conservation/wildlife medicine that I have received. It has also greatly changed my perspective on exotic pets, zoos, and generally how I perceive the connection between humans and wildlife animals.

## **Program Evaluation**

### **How satisfied were you with the food and housing arrangements?**

I was very satisfied with the food especially since it was food native to Guatemala. I appreciated the fact that they tried to accommodate everyone's particular nutritional needs, even though it did not apply to me. In regards to the housing arrangement, it was about what I would expect for a rescue center that focuses most of its funds towards their animals. Though I was surprised that they had internet access on site even if it wasn't the best quality. Overall I was fairly satisfied with my stay at ARCAS.

### **What were the highlights of your experience?**

I would have to say that it is a close tie between the trip to Tikal to see the Mayan ruins and working closely with the wild animals. I have always loved history and art so seeing the architecture of the ruins and learning about the Mayan culture was an exhilarating experience. However as an aspiring veterinarian that hopes to work with wild animals for conservation I was such an amazing experience getting to do exactly that with so many different species through the mentorship of excellent vets like Dr. Morales and Dr. Fernando.

### **What advice would you give yourself before signing up?**

I definitely wish I had brushed up on my Spanish more before going. Though I could make it through the trip without it, it was very difficult and would have been even more so without a translator. I also wish I would have remembered a raincoat because there were several times that it rained excessively.

### **What did you not expect/what surprised you the most about this experience?**

I was surprised how hands-on the experience was as well as how much the instructors encouraged us to be more hands-on. I genuinely thought we would spend more time watching the veterinarians work with the animals that we would be doing the work. This is primarily because the program allowed pre-vet and first year vet students which would not have very much animal handling or clinical experience.

### **Did you observe any difference in veterinary practice there compared to in the U.S.?**

One of the main differences that I noticed was that there were several cases in which in the states you would typically have just euthanized the patient (especially if it was a wild animal brought into the clinic) but they would try to treat it. However, on the other hand because they are dealing with wild animals, if an animal came in with cancer they would not consider treating with chemotherapy due to causing too much stress. Overall, much of the differences between their practice and the practices I have seen in the US involves the animals that are more commonly seen and the end goal that is intended. In the US, most of the animals that typically would see in practice were domesticated animals or captive animals intended to go back to a private owner or zoo, while at ARCAS many of the animals that were brought in were typically intended to be released eventually.

**What challenge/opportunities did you face on the program and how you handled them? What did you learn from that experience?**

The greatest opportunity that I faced was working directly hands-on with wild animals that were intended to be released back into the wild. This is was an amazing experience because I learned not only how to handle and treat different wild species but I also gained some insight into what it takes to work in conservation medicine. Conservation medicine has always been my intended field of practice so it was amazing to actually experience some of what that entails. This experience has truly solidified my drive to work in conservation medicine, despite knowing the challenges I will face.

*This form must be submitted within one month after the experience. Failure to meet the deadline will result in losing credit for the experience. Please email [cvmip@iastate.edu](mailto:cvmip@iastate.edu) with any questions.*