

AFO Hutton Scholars: Where are they now?

Benjamin Franklin once said “Tell me, and I forget. Teach me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I learn.”

At the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Alabama Field Office (AFO), we take Franklin’s philosophy to heart. Since 2009, the AFO has been hosting young students to help achieve their dreams of conserving natural resources. Through the American Fisheries Society’s Hutton Program, AFO biologists have mentored four high school students to help set them on a path to a career in biology.

The Hutton Program is an eight week mentoring opportunity that allows high school students to intern with fisheries professionals. In addition, the students also receive a \$4,000 scholarship. High school seniors and juniors are eligible, and the scholar is selected from a pool of candidates.

Once a scholar is selected, he or she is paired with a mentor. Although Andy Ford and Jennifer Grunewald are their lead mentors, most of the staff plays a role in guiding the scholar. Even our trusted partners have turned into dedicated mentors. Biologists with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources have also taken Hutton scholars under their wing.

This year, Ford and Grunewald are responsible for the scholar’s eight-week schedule. They will give them hands-on experience in what it takes to be a fisheries biologist. Typical work includes mussel surveys, gopher tortoise relocations, sea turtle nest patrols, red-bellied turtle fencing, and stream fish sampling just to name a few.

Garrett Lloyd of Fairhope was the AFO’s first official Hutton Scholar in 2009. During his internship, he worked with multiple agencies and groups, allowing him to network and experience many aspects of biology. His hard work paid off. Garrett’s connections landed him



Mentors Andy Ford and Jeff Powell assist Hutton Scholar Dionna Walker; photo: USFWS

jobs with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources as well as the Week’s Bay Foundation. His most recent opportunity came as he attended college at Troy University. He became a part of the Pathways program...a federal program that selects college students and employs them with specific agencies. The program may lead Garrett to full time employment after graduation.

Below is a list of other Hutton Scholars who spent the summer with the Alabama Field Office. How are they doing now?

2010 Hutton Scholar David Bernasconi

– Since finishing the program, David received a bachelor’s degree from Louisiana State University in Natural Resource Ecology and Management with a concentration in Wildlife Ecology. While in school, he was an alligator research technician and conducted his own bald eagle migration project. After that, David worked as an avian technician in the mountains of Borneo in Malaysia. He was also a volunteer research assistant at the Danau Girang Field Center, also in Malaysia, where he helped to track and trap clouded leopards, sun bears, and other species. This past summer, David was a bald eagle technician for the North Carolina Resources Commission. He is currently looking for graduate school opportunities, and eventually wants to earn his PhD.

“This program holds a special place in my heart as it gave me a huge leg up in the eyes of my undergrad professors and early employers. I am still in contact with my mentors today and they have been extremely important friends and professional resources.”

2013 Hutton Scholar Katie Dankovic

– Katie is attending the University of South Alabama, where she is majoring in Biology with a concentration in Marine Sciences. She joined a team of Biology majors, working on various projects overseen by her Herpetology professor. One project entailed finding populations of the Bahaman Anole, a highly invasive species in both Mobile and Baldwin Counties. Katie is also working on a database for evidence of cancerous tumors in reptiles, specifically turtles, in various zoos and aquariums. She plans to spend the summer with the Dauphin Island Sea Lab, where she’ll study sharks, rays, and Marine Conservation Biology. She has also taken up birding three times a week! Katie graduates in December.

“Before I participated in the Hutton Program I wasn’t exactly sure that I wanted to major in Biology in college. But after participating in the program for the summer, I went into college very confident that I could major in Biology and enjoy it. The Hutton Program gave me some much needed confidence in myself to succeed.”

2015 Hutton Scholar Dionna Walker

– Fresh from her internship, Dionna is just getting started! She’s a freshman at the University of Alabama Birmingham, double majoring in Biology and International Studies, in addition to minoring in Environmental Studies. Since her college career is just beginning, she spends most of her time studying. Dionna is in the Science and Technology Specialized Honors Program, which is designed to help undergraduate students get involved in research and complete a thesis project. She hopes to begin lab work and start on her project by fall of next year.

“I had a great time working at the Alabama Field Office. I feel like I learned a lot and got to know some amazing people. My favorite part of the internship was the field work. It was interesting, engaging and gave me a chance to get my hands dirty and get to know a lot of people in a different way than I would have just in the office.”

Stay tuned to the Alabama Field Office Facebook page to see who may be selected as our 2016 Hutton Scholar! <https://www.facebook.com/usfwsalabama/>