Awards and Scholarships

2020 Berryman Institute Scholarship Recipient

The recipient of the 2020 Berryman Institute Scholarship is Amanda Penicks of California State Polytechnic University of Pomona. This $1,000 scholarship is awarded to undergraduate students nationwide who demonstrate an interest in pursuing a career in human–wildlife conflict management or wildlife damage management.

“I am currently a student at California State Polytechnic University of Pomona, where I will be obtaining a bachelor’s degree in agriculture sciences and a minor in pest and disease management. After completing my bachelor’s degree, I will continue to graduate school for a master’s degree in biological sciences and later continue for a Ph.D. To enhance my skillset for practical application, I will be obtaining a QAL (Qualified Applicators License) and GIS and GPS certification. My goal is to become a vector ecologist; the position entails aiding in the preservation of the health and well-being of humans as well as animal populations, which creates a safer disease-free environment. I would be aiding the public and environment with the implementation of pest management strategies and prevention to minimize the pest impact and potential vectors of zoonotic disease transmission, such as Zika Virus, West Nile Virus, Dengue, Typhus, etc. This position is the best of both worlds: to work outdoors in nature as well as working in a laboratory with peers and professionals working toward a common goal of minimizing disease prevention. While continuing my education, I have been working as a laboratory field intern for 5 years at the Orange County Mosquito and Vector Control District, where I assist vector ecologists and collaborate with government and/or local agencies. There are many duties to my position as a laboratory field intern, such as working in various environments and agricultural settings, monitoring various animal species, utilizing mapping software, keeping tabulations of data, utilizing Integrated Pest Management and forms of biological control, necropsies on specimens to determine means of death, working to identify specimens in a laboratory, and testing samples for disease or virus. I also aid with monitoring and surveillance of mammal pest populations, backyard wildlife (skunks, raccoons, possums, etc.), and invertebrate populations. During this time, the district allowed me to present my research, “Jumping into the Future,” at the Mosquito and Vector Control Association of California Conference. For this project, I analyzed the variations or differences of the vertebrate populations and disease prevalence of flea populations over the course of 3 decades in Orange County, California. My work for the project has been published in the 2019 proceedings. I also presented at the Vertebrate Pest Conference on vertebrate pest populations, the diversity of the flea species, along with the invertebrate rate of disease. My research will be published in the 2020 proceedings. The lab staff collected backyard wildlife or vertebrate pests in urban areas and collected ectoparasites samples to test for disease surveillance to determine the flea index for each of the collected mammals. My lab intern position allows me to utilize my passion for science to aid the public and environmental health.”

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