

Dear Rotary District 7475,

I'm writing with an update on my first semester at the University of St Andrews as one of the recipients of a Rotary Global Scholarship in the Environmental Protection Area of Focus. I am so grateful for the support of the Rotary Foundation, District 7475, the Rotary Club of the Plainfields and the wider Rotary community as I pursue my master's degree.



My first semester of the Statistical Ecology MSc was very challenging, especially as I am spending this year outside my biology comfort zone and firmly in the School of Mathematics and Statistics! However, I have already learned so much relevant material that I had never been exposed to six months ago! I took a full course load of classes on statistical theory, computer programming, and modeling wildlife population dynamics. This made for a particularly heavy workload as I learned the coding and theoretical fundamentals needed for my coursework projects, but I now have proficiency coding in the statistical software "R" which is widely used in the field of ecology, and I can utilize some of the most common techniques for modeling wildlife population sizes. I've also received training in communicating statistics across a range of audiences from scientific to the general public. I think my new coding and foundational knowledge in statistics and modeling will be helpful in my future research in conservation ecology. My MSc

program cohort comes from around the world and brings a diverse perspective to class discussions.

Although my course load has been quite intense, I've also squeezed in some time to participate in extracurricular life at St Andrews occasionally! I joined the Caledonian Society which meets weekly to practice Scottish reeling, which is a form of traditional country dancing. I also attended a hiking trip with the Mountaineering Society to the West coast highlands where we had amazing views of a group of mountains called the Five Sisters of Kintail. The town of St Andrews is filled with medieval architecture and very beautiful, and I can even see the 12th century cathedral out my window.



The members of the St Andrews Rotary Club have also been very welcoming, and it has been lovely to get involved with the Rotary community locally in Scotland. I presented to the St Andrews Rotary Club on my past research experience in wildlife biology and on issues in human-wildlife coexistence. I traveled with a few St Andrews Rotarians to their annual District meeting, where I learned about some of the charitable work of other clubs in North Scotland, and presented my research to the attendees. I learned some more about some of the challenges Rotary faces in attracting and retaining younger members. I saw the lighter side of Rotary, attending the Christmas fundraising quiz at the Blairgowrie Rotary Club. Since this is where my grandparents live, they joined the fun, and I was invited to speak at their club this spring.



Before returning to New Jersey for the holidays, I traveled south to England to attend the British Ecological Society Conference in Liverpool. My research was accepted for the poster presentation session, and I was able to present my undergraduate thesis project on carnivores in the Colorado Rockies to some of the more than 1,500 other scientists and students from around the world attending. This was my first time presenting my work at a major scientific conference, and it was very exciting to listen to talks on a wide range of ecological research and network with professionals in the field.

After spending time with my family relaxing over the holidays after a very busy fall in Scotland, I am poised to return to St Andrews and start classes in the new term. I'm hoping to join more mountaineering trips and do some hiking around the region to enjoy the amazing coastal scenery. I also will be getting involved with a St Andrews RC event called the Schools Forum to discuss environmental issues with the local high schools.

Thanks again to all the Rotary Club members who have helped to make this graduate school experience possible for me.

Sincerely,
Isabel DeVito