



THE GreenWay

SCA'S CONSERVATION QUARTERLY | SUMMER 2015

SPECIAL EDITION: SCA MEMBERS IN THEIR OWN WORDS



This internship has "given me a concrete way to contribute" to the Everglades restoration project, Sarika says.



Every Day is a Meaningful Adventure

by Sarika Khanwilkar, SCA Biology Intern

I CONFESS: I'M AN ADRENALINE JUNKIE. The feeling of epinephrine released into my blood—that increased heart rate and heightened sense of awareness as part of an innate response to perceived danger—is euphoric.

I'm also a science junkie, and I chose an SCA biology internship because it seemed like it would involve a ton of conservation field work that would satisfy both my needs, and that's definitely turned out to be the case. Naturally, when the opportunity to participate in the ultimate science adventure with the water quality program at Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee NWR arose, I couldn't resist.

Not many people get an aerial view of the refuge interior. From above, the refuge transformed into a network of marshes, tree islands, gator holes, and game trails, birds flying everywhere.

When our helicopter landed, we grabbed our gear and walked through the water and muck to a boat. Soon the hum of the engine, the wind in my face, and the reflection of the clouds on the glassy water created a meditative state of mind. However relaxing, it's hard not to think about the system of canals and levees as a symbol of humanity's impact on the Everglades.

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CONSERVATION BEGINS HERE.

Student Conservation Association
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Broad Sustainability Spectrum of SCA

I hope you had a wonderful summer. At SCA, thanks to our remarkable volunteers, the season was our most accomplished yet. It was also bookended by two telling events.

In June, I was privileged to join Chicago Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Indiana Dunes National Seashore Supt. Paul Labovitz and BP President John Mingé in kicking off SCA's most robust Chicago program ever. SCA Chicago crew alumnus Kailon Lang who stole the show by noting that SCA had shown him how to be a leader (see opposite).

Our expanded Chicago program—including the addition of SCA's Urban Tree House, which provides K-12 students with free environmental education and outdoor activities—is indicative of SCA's unyielding commitment to engage more people in homegrown stewardship. As the US population becomes more urban, SCA is broadening the practice of conservation from our wilderness to our cities, and growing the "green movement" exponentially.

As August closed, I attended another news conference, flanked by National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis and SCA Centennial Volunteer Ambassador Ayomide Sekiteri. On the National Mall, as we observed the 99th anniversary of the National Park Service, I had the pleasure of announcing a new partnership with American Express that will activate thousands of volunteers to protect our national parks for the NPS Centennial (more on Page 8).

These two events marked either end of the SCA spectrum. As we maintain our nearly 60 year commitment to conserving treasured public lands that annually draw millions of visitors, we are also keenly focused on promoting sustainability to the millions of people who live in our cities, particularly under-served youth.

This special edition of *The Green Way* features the unfiltered and authentic accounts of SCA members from the many parks, forests and communities we serve. On their behalf, and from all of us at SCA, thank you for your continued and generous support.

Jaime B. Matyas

Meaningful Adventure *continued from page 1*

We've engineered an entire landscape to create agricultural areas and land that is dry enough to build on. Loxahatchee NWR has the responsibility of mitigating this transformation to provide suitable habitat for native plants and wildlife. Water quality is monitored because we need to learn how to best mimic the natural state of the Everglades, with seasonal variation and nutrient-poor marsh.

I took samples to measure temperature, pH, conductivity, turbidity, salinity and dissolved oxygen, and processed them back at the lab. This internship has given me a concrete way to contribute to what's been called "the most expensive and comprehensive [ecosystem] restoration effort in history."

Helicopters and airboats satisfy my desire for adventure, but what really motivates me is the importance preserving the health of the refuge and greater Everglades ecosystem.



Sarika draws inspiration from the work of Rachel Carson and describes her dream job as "anything that allows me to study coastal wildlife and the ocean." In addition to her two friends (above), Sarika holds a degree in biology from Gonzaga University.

A Bird in the Hand

by Sara Prussing, SCA Bio-Tech Intern

At Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, the wetlands resound with an enticing cacophony of breeding birds. Passing by a stand of reeds, a lucky visitor might hear the whinny of a nearby sora or the territorial grunt of a Virginia rail. Today, though, my eyes are set on a less elusive target.

Refuge biologist Howard Browers and I are on a shorebird banding mission. High-pitched kleets ring in our ears as the mascots of Bear River Refuge, American avocets, glide into view. The avocets are in full breeding mode, adorned with cinnamon hoods and shadowed by their offspring. Once I spot three avocet chicks wading idly on our right, the game is on.

I hop out of our truck, net in hand and wader boots pounding the ground. The chicks scatter in different directions, and my attention is entirely focused on the farthest of the three. It runs freely above the sulfurous mud, and I follow with a galumphing stride. I close the gap and reach out my net, closer, closer... SCHLUMP! Without warning, my left boot slides off and I collapse in the muck. Scrambling, I watch the chick disappear behind a curtain of bulrush. As I pass the spot, I glance down to see a bundle of feathers crouched between the stems. I gently close my fingers around its torso and begin the long trek back to shore.

Bear River Refuge is working in collaboration with Weber State University to band as many American avocet chicks as possible. If a banded bird is spotted again at a later time, the observer can enter its unique band number and location into the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center Bird Banding Laboratory website, which contains the numbers and locations of more than four million re-sightings. This information helps scientists to better understand the migration routes and longevity of many bird species in North America.

As a birder and an aspiring conservation biologist, it is an honor to work at a renowned wild bird refuge. While I am honing new field techniques and computer skills, I am also learning about what it takes to manage an 80,000-acre refuge.



Sara is a graduate of the SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry. She also served with SCA last summer, conducting conifer surveys for the Juneau Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Alaska.

An Interview with SCA Crew Leader KAILON LANG



Chicago's Kailon Lang, 19, (center) enjoyed two previous SCA crews before returning this year as an apprentice crew leader. His first day on the job, Kailon started with Mayor Rahm Emanuel (left) and other VIPs at a news conference to kick-off SCA's Chicago summer season, sponsored by BP America. We spoke with him at the crew's midway point.

SCA: Back for a third year. You must enjoy SCA life...

KL: Working with SCA has been tremendous. I've had the privilege of working under exceptional crew leaders and with crew members from different parts of Chicago who care about making a sustainable impact on our environment and protecting biodiversity.

SCA: How is this summer going?

KL: Each day, I'm getting more confident. I really like my other apprentice crew leaders at Dan Ryan Woods. The more we are together, the better our chemistry gets, which will lead to future success in completing conservation projects.

SCA: And how is it leading crew members?

KL: During my training, I learned there are four types of learning styles: verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, and intra-personal. I now know when to use each one, depending on how engaged my crew is when doing an activity.

SCA: Any other highlights?

KL: My connection to nature has increased. I have a better understanding of how nature intertwines with our world and how it functions.

SCA: You seemed to connect with the mayor, too...

KL: It was great to meet Mayor Emmanuel. He's a really nice guy, an incredible person who cares about making Chicago one of the most enjoyable cities to live in. It was a memorable experience that I will keep for the rest of my life.

SCA: It was an unusual first day on the job...

KL: I have to admit I was a little bit nervous, but I really appreciate the support and confidence everyone had in me.



Photo: Noah Schlager

On the Santa Fe Trail by Noah Schlager, SCA Media Intern

Along the Santa Fe Trail towards Fort Union National Monument, the mountains recede to mounds along the horizon, and you can feel the curve of the earth as though you are standing on an enormous fisheye lens.

I thought such an expanse of flatness would be about as stimulating as a parking lot, but instead some part of my brain that remembers itself to be a savannah ape was switched on. The slope of the land and color of grass stood out in my mind like a living Van Gogh painting.

How must this have felt to the men and women who came along this trail before me? Before they had photographs and Westerns to nominally prepare them?

The Santa Fe Trail stretches over twelve hundred miles of prairie, desert, and mountains. Before it was created, pueblo and plains tribes developed trading routes that reached across the continent. The Santa Fe stitched together many of these previously existing routes to connect Santa Fe—then part of Mexico—to Franklin, Missouri, creating one of the most lucrative trading routes of the 19th century.

For my SCA Americorps internship, I am assisting in the creation of a mobile media tour of the trail. The tour will be a sort of pocket interpreter, allowing you to access information on the history, stories, culture, and ecology of whatever section of trail you happen to be traversing.

As valuable as individual parks and wildernesses may be, they create a dualism. Inside is protected, outside is free game; inside is sacred, outside profane; inside is nature, outside is humanity. A trail obscures this. Like a river, it follows the path of least resistance, but its shores are constantly changing and shifting. It ties cultures and environments together and reminds us that the most valuable forms of conservation don't protect in isolation, but connect people to resources in a way that keeps the river flowing.

Noah considers himself “the result of mixing Southern and Jewish genes, equally at home with cornbread or kugel.” He graduated from Eckerd College with a degree in Environmental Studies.

VIEW VOLUNTEER VIDEOS, PHOTOS AND
BLOGS at thesca.org/roadtrip

The Natural Order

by Sonam Ahluwalia, SCA Visitor Services Intern

The “circle of life” is a concept I study and understand; however, when observing this phenomenon first hand, the concept unfolds emotional dimensions.

When we view nature, we do not always think about the interdependency of living creatures or how one must die for another to live. At Patuxent Research Refuge, I am challenged to question the way nature works. However, I cannot inquire the reason for the circle of life because the answer is always natural order.

As a refuge, we allow nature to continue its course, until a particular species undergoes injustice due to human impact. At this point, we attempt to rectify the negative impact by providing habitats or controlled environments.

Here we install bird nest boxes to help replenish the blue bird and chickadee populations. Volunteers check these boxes weekly, including one behind the visitor center with five tree swallows. One day we heard faint screams and rushed to the box to find a black rat snake with a filled belly inside the box. This pierced my heart because I had watched these baby birds grow, reaching flight stage. However, I had to remind myself that the snake’s role is a predator and nature assigns roles.



Another Patuxent research project focuses on whooping cranes, an endangered species. Whooping cranes are large, light-weight birds about five feet tall and fifteen pounds, with a wing span of eight feet. Fifty years ago, there were only a handful of them left. However, the refuge has revived the population to about six hundred cranes presently.

The refuge breeds the cranes carefully but when chicks are born, sibling rivalry develops. The natural instinct of the young birds is to fight until one dies; therefore, only one chick per crane couple survives. Once again, the natural order may not make sense, but there remains an abstract reason for this reaction which we as humans may or may not figure out.

Sonam is an active member of the Green Patriots at George Mason University, a group of students that meets regularly to hear from guest experts and discuss environmental topics.



GET TO WORK!!

Would you like your donation to go right to work, just like the many young SCA volunteers in the field right now?

GIVE MONTHLY TO SCA

Your recurring gift to SCA does just that! It goes right to work where the need is greatest—regardless of time of year—day in day out.

SCA’s members work year-round in our nation’s parks and forests—and SCA’s **TRAIL BUILDERS** monthly giving program allows you to provide ongoing, monthly support of our youth in the field.

YOU CAN

Make automatic transfers from your credit card or your bank account. Reduce the costs of fundraising. Provide much needed support of SCA’s members year-round.

In addition to SCA’s quarterly print newsletter, *The GreenWay*, you will also receive our monthly e-newsletter, *Hands On*, and an annual statement of your support for the year, for your tax purposes. In addition, we’ll send you a copy of our beautiful annual **SCA Wall Calendar**.

Learn more about the **TRAIL BUILDERS**—and let your monthly giving *get to work!*

Visit thesca.org/tgw

Save the Monarchs! by Elizabeth Braatz, SCA Biology Intern



Monarch butterflies are in danger. Their population has declined from a peak of one billion in 1996-97 to a low of 33 million butterflies in 2013-14—a crash of more than 97%. Although their numbers went up in 2015, this still represents a staggering decline.

However, some exciting things give me cause to be cautiously optimistic. One of them is the *Pollinator Resolution*.

The Pollinator Resolution was started as a regional partnership among the National Park Service's St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's St. Croix Wetland Management District, and the U.S. Forest

Service's Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest. The partners have pledged to promote the restoration and creation of habitat for Monarchs and to educate the public about these beautiful creatures.

As interns, we spend most of our time working in teams to complete large surveys, but each intern gets an individual project to focus on as well. Much to my delight, my project is to help promote the Pollinator Resolution.

St. Croix WMD gets frequent inquiries from people asking how they can help Monarchs, so my supervisor wanted me to design a brochure. Early drafts included drawing the stick-person equivalent of a butterfly, but with help from my awesome co-workers the final version includes a beautiful ArcMap map and recommended pollinator species for your garden.

I am passionate about protecting nature and promoting sustainable living. The personal satisfaction of completing projects I know will help the region's ecosystems and people is truly amazing. Time is precious, and I want to spend it with an organization like SCA whose work is so meaningful.

An avid volunteer, Elizabeth is part of the Career Discovery Internship Program, a collaboration between SCA and the US Fish and Wildlife Service that connects culturally and ethnically diverse college students to wildlife-focused career opportunities.

It's Simple to Provide a Legacy for SCA's Future

Explore Other Ways to Give

You can make future gifts to SCA from financial plans you already have in place but have previously earmarked for other purposes. If you want to make a meaningful and lasting charitable gift to SCA, you can:

- ★ *Name SCA as beneficiary of all or a portion of the remainder of retirement plan accounts.*
- ★ *Give a share in the proceeds of life insurance policies no longer needed for their original purpose (such as the payment of estate taxes that may no longer be due).*
- ★ *Name SCA to receive all or a portion of what remains in investment and savings accounts through what are known as "pay on death" provisions.*



Visit thesca.GivingPlan.net for more information about including SCA in the charitable aspects of your plans.

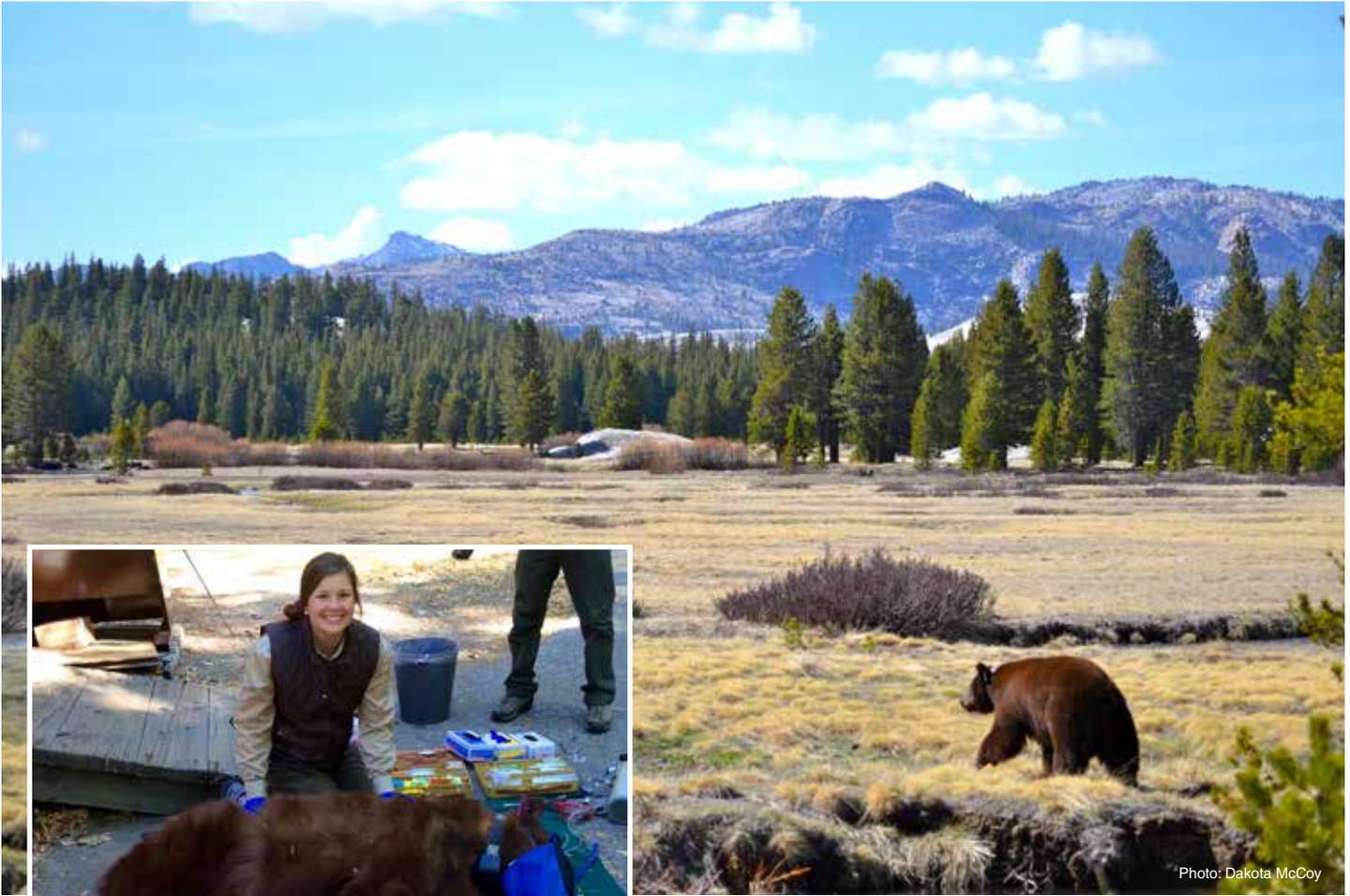


Photo: Dakota McCoy



Photo: Andi Stewart/NPS

GET DAKOTA'S FREE BEAR-AWARE GUIDE FOR CAMPERS.
Download at thesca.org/bear-tips

The Same Dust as We by Dakota McCoy, SCA Bear Management Intern

I often get asked how it feels to call a national park “home” and, in truth, it’s as wondrous as it sounds. My daily routine in Yosemite Valley as a Bear Management Intern for SCA involves seeing a variety of animals: mule deer feeding in the lush green meadows, the steller’s jay vocalizing outside my office window, and my day would not be complete without seeing one of Yosemite’s most iconic animals—a bear!

Yosemite National Park has an estimated 300-500 bears. In Yosemite Valley alone, we have a total of eleven collared individuals. Out of those eleven, eight of them have GPS (Global Positioning System) collars, which allow us to receive fixes on each bear every hour on the hour and track their every move.

Collaring wildlife is crucial for management purposes, especially in a place like Yosemite Valley, which hosts over four million visitors a year. The data we receive allow us to better manage each bear. We are able to gain information such as what their home ranges are, where they den in the

winter, what meadows they visit in search of food, and potentially what other bears they could be mating with!

In Yosemite Valley, we mainly focus on managing the conflict between humans and wildlife. I spend my nights mitigating the human food available in campgrounds, picnic areas, and other places visitors frequent. I also spend a majority of my time educating people on the importance of storing their food properly to help keep our bears in Yosemite wild.

“Bears are made of the same dust as we,” said John Muir, “and breathe the same winds and drink of the same waters.” Working for the Student Conservation Association this summer has allowed me to learn more than I could have ever imagined about the conservation and management that goes into protecting such an incredible species.

Dakota is heading to South Dakota this fall to volunteer at Badlands National Park. She majored in Environmental Studies at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania.



The American Institute of Philanthropy and Charity Navigator rank SCA among America's top conservation charities for fund-raising efficiency.

SCA is a nationwide conservation force of college and high school volunteers who protect and restore America's parks, forests, and other public lands. SCA's active, hands-on approach to conservation has helped to develop a new generation of conservation leaders, inspire lifelong stewardship, and save our planet.

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SCA Intern Finds Her Park

On August 25th, SCA and American Express marked the National Park Service's 99th birthday by announcing a new partnership that will mobilize thousands of volunteers to conserve parks across the country in advance of next year's NPS centennial. On The National Mall in Washington, DC with NPS Director Jon Jarvis looking on, SCA Centennial Volunteer Ambassador Ayomide Sekiteri told the crowd, in part:

"I am here to break the myth that young people, and especially young people of color, don't care about national parks or, for that matter, nature.

My experiences with SCA and NPS have helped me immensely in my journey of self-discovery. I know my history can be found in the national parks and I sense my future can be too.

"I'm here to explore the outdoors as well as a career. I'm here to exercise my right to enjoy these awe-inspiring places, as well as my responsibility to care for them. I'm here because I found my park and I want you to find your park!"

For more on Ayomide's remarks and the SCA-AMEX partnership, visit thesca.org/findyourpark



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NPS Director Jon Jarvis (left) presented SCA's Ayomide Sekiteri with a commemorative coin following her remarks on The Mall.