

JAMES RENNIE BEQUEST

REPORT ON EXPEDITION

Expedition Title: Canada 2010

Travel Dates: 17th May – 5th August 2010.....

Location: Sheep River Provincial Park, Alberta, Canada.....

Group Member(s): Sophie Nicole Eastwood and Adam David Peter Cross

Aims: To understand how resource selection varies seasonally between sexes of Columbian Ground Squirrels through experimentation.

OUTCOME (not less than 300 words):-

This expedition to Sheep River Provincial Park, Canada set out in May 2010 to undertake research on Colombian ground squirrels. We worked in collaboration with Dr. Jeff Lane on his project and also undertook our own research looking at how the diet of Colombian Ground Squirrels varies over time.

On arrival at Sheep River we initially worked alongside Jeff and his team assisting them on their research, which involved studying how climate change influences the squirrels' emergence from hibernation. This research allowed an insight into a differing aspect of study from our own independent project and helped give a greater overview of the differing aspects of research currently being undertaken. Furthermore, other researchers at the station working on a range of studies and animals from Bighorn Sheep to Red Squirrels gave a greater insight into the life of a researcher.

Our own project allowed us to further our own skills, in particular the development of novel studies and how best to plan and initiate our approach. Our study primarily involved observing the squirrels through binoculars and recording what species of vegetation they ate. This latter point also involved extensive research into Canadian plant identification. Whilst our own project involved primarily observing the squirrels, our understanding of research methods increased through work on Jeff's project. On this project, we were able to trap squirrels, handle them, mark them with dye, ear tag the juveniles and also take other measurements, such as weight, head size and foot length.

The outcome of our own project is currently being written up for scientific publication and whilst the data are based on only one year we hope that our novel method of research and differing results to the literature will make the paper an interesting read. A copy of the paper will be sent to the James Rennie bequest upon completion.

On a personal note, this study introduced me to many new ideas and methods. The study showed us how to work effectively within a team in remote isolated places and it also gave us an appreciation for the difficulties of adverse weather during research. Furthermore, the independence of our project gave us responsibility and an opportunity to develop both our research and personal skills.