

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):-

Adam and I organised this expedition in collaboration with Dr Jeff Lane, a former researcher at the University of Edinburgh. In general our main aim was to gain research experience to help us with our future careers in ecology. In particular, I was looking forward to having a more active role in planning this expedition than I had done on my previous expedition to Mexico in 2009.

For this expedition the aim was to understand how resource selection varied between sexes of Columbian ground squirrels through observation and experimentation. It was also to assist Dr Jeff Lane and Professor Loeske Kruuk with their ongoing research. Our research activities were divided between the two projects. Our independent project consisted mainly of foraging and behavioural observations, plant identification and data management. Whilst for Jeff's project we were mainly trapping, handling and processing the ground squirrels, which included ear tagging and marking individuals. But we also got experience in scoping and practical work with enclosures and fences.

Our learning was not limited to our study species and the field site. We were fortuitously based in Sheep River Provincial Park. Not only were the landscapes and wildlife extraordinary but we lived with other researchers and thus constantly immersed in research. Even staying at the remote field station was an experience in itself!

We will write a scientific report based on our findings from the expedition research. We feel that our preliminary results answer our research questions and hopefully we will contribute to the current knowledge in this field. We have both started to get to grips with what research actually entails, especially before and after the actual field season.

On a more personal basis we gained experience by being fully responsible for our project, this includes planning, fieldwork, data management and much more. With these extra responsibilities comes unexpected difficulties, and rewards. We have obviously benefitted intellectually but personally too. Perhaps the most important learning experience in expedition organisation is to understand the importance of planning but also the importance of continually adapting those plans.