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## THE GIRL WHO SAVES PANGOLINS

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# A GIRL, HER GILMAN, AND A PANGOLIN

One fellowship recipient's hands-on work with the most trafficked mammal in the world

BY ERICA LEVI ZELINGER

**A** tail slap in the face by a starved pangolin is enough to ward off jet lag. That's the first lesson Ashleigh Jugan learned on the night of her arrival in Cuc Phuong National Park for a six-month co-op with Save Vietnam's Wildlife (SVW). It was hard to see the animal suffering, but Ashleigh jumped right in; the vets and volunteers enlisted her to record, identify, feed and administer health checks for 113 of these scaly, anteater-like animals – the most the non-profit had ever saved.

Four years prior, the senior environmental science major had never heard of the most trafficked mammal in the world. In 2014, Ashleigh's boyfriend Nick read an NPR article about the endangered species and asked her if she knew about the pangolin. She was unaware – and dismayed – to read that it is considered a high-end delicacy and status symbol in Southeast Asia and China. Ashleigh later had a chance encounter with the nocturnal animal on a trip to Bali, where staff at a zoo let her touch one. So intrigued by the soft-bellied animal, and yet bothered by the unethical hands-on experience, Ashleigh began researching programs where she could study the species' behavior and stressors.

Which is how she found SVW, a non-profit organization that focuses on the conservation of threatened native wildlife through rescue, rehabilitation and protection.

"You see elephants, pandas and rhinos in the news all the time," Ashleigh says, "and these flagship species earn a lot of money for conservation. But here we have the most trafficked mammal in the world, and no one knows it even exists."

Motivated by her career goals of working with endangered species, Ashleigh sought to secure a co-op at SVW, positioned in a crucial location in Vietnam for pangolin trafficking networks. The center, however, relies heavily on volunteers and donations and requires a fee from unpaid workers to cover housing, food, and care for the animals at the center.

But Ashleigh didn't have the means to sustain herself on an unpaid co-op in Vietnam for six months. She grew up in a family that struggled financially, burdened by her father's health and his medical expenses.

Where attending college had seemed like a miracle, traveling the world and doing work she'd been dreaming about, seemed nearly impossible.

Ashleigh began working with the Pennoni Fellowships Office two years ago to apply for a myriad of scholarships to cover her education and living expenses. She's now garnered three: the Gilman International Scholarship, the Freeman ASIA, and the Udall.

The Gilman Scholarship and Freeman ASIA award are programs intended to increase the diversity and impact of well-qualified students studying abroad with financial need who will benefit academically and professionally from the international experience. The Udall Undergraduate Scholarship is awarded to the nation's top undergraduates committed to improving the environment. Ashleigh will join an active community of Udall Scholars and alums working across the country to address some of our most difficult environmental challenges.

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“Ashleigh took a risk by foregoing an established co-op and applying for external funding to support her unpaid co-op,” said Dr. Meredith Wooten, director of the Center for Scholar Development. “And that risk paid off. She received two merit scholarships, making her the second Drexel student to receive a Freeman-Asia award since the program was established in 2001 and the first Drexel student to receive both awards in one year!”

The ambitious student grew up in a very small, rural town outside Reading, Pennsylvania, and moved with her parents to Amherst, Massachusetts at age 14 for better schools and a better life.

When Ashleigh’s family lived in Reading, her father was being treated at the Hospital of University of Pennsylvania. So, every few weeks, her parents would take Ashleigh’s brother and her to the Philadelphia Zoo following his appointments. No matter her father’s pain, it was a chance for the family to be together – and she and her brother always made a beeline for the otters. “The zoo never got old,” she says. “We loved watching the otters – how fast and

graceful they were in the water, always so playful and fun to observe.”

Ashleigh parlayed her love of animals into an environmental science major at Drexel, with a concentration in ecology and conservation. As a freshman, she participated in Pennoni’s iSTAR Scholars Program, conducting research on mine drainage in Oulu, Finland. She serves as program chair of the Office of Undergraduate Research Leaders and a member of the Office’s Supernova fellows. She is a STAR peer mentor, an Honors student, and in addition to the Gilman and Freeman awards, Ashleigh is the recipient of such academic honors as the NSF funded Drexel Study Abroad in Cameroon, a three-week field course to study large mammals in their natural habitat. She was also finalist for the NOAA Ernest F. Hollings Undergraduate Scholarship.


“While working with animals in a remote village in Vietnam was not glamorous, the opportunity to gain firsthand experience with wildlife conservation and rehabilitation has already allowed Ashleigh to form new



connections with experts in the field and to develop new and clearer postgraduate plans,” Dr. Wooten says.

When she graduates in June, Ashleigh will pursue a PhD in conservation biology. She’s also applying for Fulbright and the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program. Her eventual goal is to work in some sort of leadership position, advising national or international organizations such as Fish and Wildlife Services, International Union for Conservation of Nature or even the U.N.

And it was because of these grants, Ashleigh says, that she was able to make a difference. And have the most rewarding experience of her life.

After four weeks of treating pangolin wounds and eye infections, Ashleigh and a team of five SVW volunteers and staff packed up 53 pangolins on a bus and drove for two days to a national park, fed them a final meal, and released them into the night. 

For more information or to donate to Save Vietnam’s Wildlife, visit [savevietnamswildlife.org/support-us/take-action/](http://savevietnamswildlife.org/support-us/take-action/)

## Bringing the World Within Reach

Studying abroad – especially twice – isn’t cheap.

All the more reason to apply for a Gilman Scholarship, says Madeline Demas (CSDN, Digital Storytelling ’18).

The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program aims to diversify the kinds of students who study and intern abroad and the countries and regions where they go by offering awards to U.S. undergraduates who might otherwise not participate due to financial constraints.

Madeline is one of 13 Drexel students to receive the scholarship since the Fellowships Office made it a priority award in 2015.

Recipients receive up to \$5,000 and are eligible to receive a Critical Need Language Award up to an additional \$3,000 for studying a “critical need language” while abroad.

Madeline’s passion for East Asia pulled her back to South Korea after completing a term abroad during her pre-junior year.

“I knew that if I wanted to seriously nail down my confidence in Korean, I would have to return and partake in an intensive language program,” Madeline says, “but the Gilman Scholarship was pretty much the only reason I was able to go back to South Korea.”

For Kacy Reitnour (Environmental Science ’20), her Gilman to study tropical biodiversity and conversation abroad in Equatorial Guinea in Winter 2017, was her first trip out of the United States.

“The program also aims to support a diverse range of students who have been traditionally under-represented in education abroad,” says Dr. Meredith Wooten, director of the Center for Scholar Development. “In addition to expanding their horizons, the experience of living abroad and learning about new cultures helps prepare these students to succeed in an increasingly global economy and interdependent world.”