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Press Release



UW-Richland student researchers

Seated (L-R): Kristin Jasper, Eli Garcia-Rivera
Standing (L – R): Max Vance, Nick Grzenia, Robin Lawver II,
Dr. Scott Walter, Ted Wipperfurth, Meaghan Hackett

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'possum diversion, duck decoys, what to wear when hunting & more . . . UW-Richland ecology students conduct research

How far do you have to move pesky critters to keep them from returning to your bird feeder? Why do ducks prefer one marsh to another? What kind of duck lures, deer scent, and hunting clothes are effective? Students in UW-Richland's Principles of Ecology course taught by Dr. Scott Walter discovered answers to these and other questions this fall.

The course focuses on the relationship between living things and the environment. "What we study in our science classes is based on the research of others," Walter explained. "These research projects required students to apply the scientific method to a topic of interest to them, and to develop a unique study aimed at evaluating their hypotheses. In essence, the student becomes the scientist." Walter knows well and describes each project.

Eli Garcia-Rivera, **Madison**, figured out the best places to look for ducks. His project looked at the loafing sites of ducks in a wetland near the Wisconsin River. He used a plankton net to estimate the amount of food (aquatic insects) in areas of the wetland frequented by ducks and in areas little used by ducks. He found that there were more ducks where there was more duck food, supporting his hypothesis that ducks prefer places where their food is plentiful.

Based on the research of Nick Grzenia, **Middleton**, hunters may want to consider buying Tink's #69 deer attractant. Grzenia compared the number of deer photographed at sites baited with three commercial deer scents with the number photographed at a control site baited with distilled water. While all three commercial lures attracted more deer than did distilled water, his research showed Tink's #69 was by far the most effective.

Meaghan Hackett, **Prairie du Chien**, was troubled with opossums in her bird feeder. She wondered how far she'd have to move the creatures to insure they wouldn't return. Her research found that when she moved them one mile nearly half of them returned. However, when she moved them three miles away, none returned.

In another study, a Principles of Ecology student examined the long-held belief that a late corn harvest can reduce the number of deer seen by hunters during the gun season, as deer don't need to move into woody cover during the day. Kristin Jasper, **Cazenovia**, set trail cameras along deer trails in the woodlands on her family farm both before and after the corn harvest. She found there were over twice as many deer in the woods after the harvest. When the corn is in the field, the deer tend to be in the corn.

Robin Lawver II, **Avoca**, focused his research on an exotic shrub species. It's known that exotic species can be troublesome because they compete with and can exclude native species. Lawver's research looked a level beyond that—at local plant-eaters who feed on exotic shrubs. A recent hypothesis suggests that exotic species, due to their unfamiliar chemical make-up, may be indigestible to native plant-eaters. His research, comparing 100 leaves from exotic honeysuckle and 100 leaves from native prickly ash, found that three times more prickly ash was consumed. "This suggests," Walter said, "that an added danger from exotic species is a reduction in the food available for insects and, hence, things that eat insects, such as songbirds."

Max Vance, **Viroqua**, looked at the effectiveness of motion-wing duck decoys. During his hunting excursions, he used a decoy spread that included a single motion-wing decoy. However, the decoy was turned on for only a portion of each hunt. He found that about twice as many ducks came within range when the decoy was turned on, suggesting that these new decoys are very effective and their use may be increasing waterfowl harvests.

Ted Wipperfurth, **Spring Green**, decided to test Scent-Lok clothing, an alternative to standard camouflage wear that's intended to eliminate the people-smell deer detect. He tested his hypothesis—that he would see more deer when wearing Scent-Lok clothing—during 18 hunt dates, on half of which he wore Scent-Lok clothing. During other hunts, he wore standard camouflage clothing. He found that while he spotted a few more deer when dressed in Scent-Lok, the difference was not statistically significant. When he tested his hypothesis, Wipperfurth was surprised at the results. "What I expected

to happen was not the actual outcome,” he said. The research findings, while interesting, were only part of what he learned. “Doing this experiment taught me how to create a project and then take the steps to do it,” Wipperfurth said.

While most of the student researchers intend majors in forestry or other natural resources areas, Kristin Jasper plans a major in early childhood education and a career as a kindergarten teacher. “Going into this class, I didn’t think I’d really enjoy it and was worried about it being a more advanced class,” she said. “But Scott Walter is a great teacher. He helped me with any questions I had. This experience has led me to take an interest in the outdoors and wildlife. I had a lot of fun and I learned a lot, as well.”

For more information about the projects or the UW-Richland natural resources program, contact Walter by e-mail at scott.walter@uwc.edu or by calling the campus at (608) 647-6186, Extension 105. ###