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Gardner-Webb Graduate Takes Research Interests to Exciting Places

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Gardner-Webb Graduate Takes Research Interests to Exciting Places

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Office of University
Communications

October 19, 2017

Christopher Lile '17 Studies Endangered Species in Madagascar

Mallory Moore '18, Intern for Communications

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.— Christopher Lile, who graduated in 2017 with a biology degree, is taking the research skills he developed at Gardner-Webb University to new and exciting places. Since leaving Gardner-Webb, Lile completed an internship at Wolf Park in Battle Ground, Ind., where he trained grey wolves and worked in husbandry and public education. His love for animals, research, and conservation have now led him to the island of Madagascar, where he is spending three months studying lemurs as a volunteer for the Omaha Zoo's Department of Conservation Genetics.



Chris Lile recently completed an internship at Wolf Park in Battle Ground, Ind., where he trained grey wolves. Photos courtesy of Monty Sloan

“The fieldwork I am currently involved with in Madagascar is unlike anything I have experienced before,” Lile shared. “We follow and observe lemurs throughout the day, while recording social interactions, feeding habits, and individual behaviors. We work directly with local Malagasy guides who can easily navigate the forests to find the lemurs.” This project also gives Lile the chance to experience a new culture in rural Madagascar. Dr. Joseph Oyugi, associate professor of biology, who taught and mentored Lile at GWU, is very proud of Lile's accomplishments and current work overseas. “It's a great satisfaction and reward to see my students succeed, expand their horizons, and follow their passion. International research and collaboration is a great opportunity to develop research skills and connections,” he commented.

Lile always had a love for animals and decided to pursue a career in biology during his second year at Gardner-Webb. “I realized

Chris Lile with several grey wolves

that my interests in research, animal behavior, and traveling were the perfect combination for a career in conservation biology,” he said. In the summer of 2016, as a Summer Undergraduate Research Scholar, Lile completed a survey of small mammals at the Broad River Greenway and the surrounding area in Boiling Springs, N.C. He and Oyugi, his mentor for the project, presented the results at North Carolina Central University's Undergraduate Research and Creativity Symposium in November 2016. Lile also presented

at GWU's Life of the Scholar Multidisciplinary Conference in March 2017 and received a presentation award. The paper from this project is currently in press at "Alethia," the Alpha Chi Journal of Undergraduate Scholarship. "The Summer Scholars Program gave me the opportunity to gain basic field research experience, which has made me a more competitive applicant when applying to field research positions," Lile stated. "I would highly recommend the summer scholars program to anyone interested in a career involving research."

Chris Lile with a wolf

Lile's time at GWU prepared him for his internships and career in several other ways. As a student, Lile served in several leadership positions including resident advisor, Student Athlete Advisory Committee representative for cross country/track and field, and GWU360 representative. These roles prepared him for working with others and taking on new challenges. The GWU faculty, particularly Oyugi and Dr. Tom Jones, professor of biology, helped Lile prepare for the future and secure research opportunities. "These professors were both especially helpful in advising me during the application process of many internships I had during my undergraduate career as well as for opportunities I've had since graduation," Lile stated.

After finishing his work in Madagascar, Lile plans to complete a more advanced internship with Wolf Park to research the cognition of the red and grey fox. He will also seek out other opportunities with organizations such as The Defenders of Wildlife. Eventually, Lile would like to pursue a doctorate in primatology, behavioral ecology, or a similar field.

[Click here to read Chris Lile's blog about Wolf Park.](#)

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.