

Gardner-Webb University

Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University

Gardner-Webb NewsCenter Archive

Gardner-Webb Publications

12-8-2015

Gardner-Webb Grad Awarded Fulbright Fellowship for Dung Beetle Research in New Zealand

Office of University Communications

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/gardner-webb-newscenter-archive>

Gardner-Webb Grad Awarded Fulbright Fellowship for Dung Beetle Research in New Zealand

 webpublish.gardner-webb.edu/newscenter/gardner-webb-grad-awarded-fulbright-fellowship-for-dung-beetle-research-in-new-zealand/

Office of University
Communications

December 8, 2015

Matt Jones ('09) Introduced to Insect Ecology as Science Student at GWU

Most people don't stop to ponder the lowly dung beetle, but Gardner-Webb University graduate Matt Jones ('09) has spent the last five years collecting and observing these little creatures.

It's a dirty job that only a serious scientist could enjoy, but his research on nature's "cleanup crew" has earned him a prestigious Fulbright Award to study the introduction of dung beetles in New Zealand.

"Receiving a Fulbright Fellowship means so much to me, because it's such a competitive fellowship program," Jones reflected. "Being chosen to represent the United States in this capacity is really encouraging. It's an incredible feeling to have the Fulbright Commission validate my research ideas and offer to host me and support the research project. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to study this very obscure, but culturally relevant, research topic in New Zealand."

The award recognizes the work Jones has done for his dissertation research at Washington State University in Pullman, Wash. For 12 months over the last two years, Jones has lived in a van, driving to farms on the west coast from California to British Columbia. He stops at each farm, sets a trap and catches dung beetles with pig droppings. The insects feed on feces, and their work can protect livestock and humans from pathogens, like E. coli, by removing feces from the soil surface and facilitating decomposition.

Summer Hess, a 2006 graduate of GWU, encouraged him to apply for the Fulbright. She was also awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to Chile in 2011 while working on her Master of Fine Arts in nonfiction writing at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Wash.

As a student in the GWU Department of Natural Sciences, Jones spent a lot of time at the Broad River Greenway. When he wasn't studying wildflower pollinators for his honors research project, he was hanging out with friends. His love for exploring the outdoors led

him to major in biology with minors in chemistry and environmental science. Gardner-Webb professors, Dr. Tom Jones and Dr. David Judge— and former faculty member Dr. James English—introduced him to entomology (study of insects) and insect ecology.

“Matt was one of those students who was supremely inquisitive about the world around him,” Tom Jones asserted. “There are very few like him who approach learning both from an academic standpoint as well as an experiential standpoint while running wide open! He was a great student.”

Judge keeps an unusual specimen produced by his former student—a reminder of Jones’ enthusiasm toward learning and good-natured spirit. “Matt took my invertebrate zoology course, where students had to catch, preserve and identify insects,” Judge recalled. “Matt did an excellent job on all parts, and even made a fake purple butterfly, hoping to make me wonder what it was. It was funny, and I still have the purple butterfly.”

The story is an example of the relationship students and professors enjoy at GWU.

“Because of the small class size I was able to connect with professors in a really meaningful way,” Jones observed. “Dr. English and Dr. Jones both fueled my interest for research, especially regarding plant-insect interactions. I’m also very appreciative of Dr. June Hobbs (director of Undergraduate Research) for organizing the undergraduate research funding for my honors project and for teaching me how to write.”

After graduating from GWU, Jones worked in an insect ecology lab for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in California and learned about many beneficial insects that often go unnoticed. For his master’s in ecology at the University of Maine of Orono, Maine, he studied insect predators and scavengers in the lowbush blueberry agroecosystem.

“I focused on insect predators of other insects and weed seeds and decided to look at insects that eat feces, too, because of a recent *E. coli*/food safety paper I had read,” he explained. “The dung beetles I studied turned out to be the most interesting part of the research project. I decided to follow up on this research as my dissertation project at Washington State University.”

With the Fulbright Award and a half-million-dollar grant from the USDA-National Institute of Food and Agriculture, Jones will spend a year in New Zealand creating standards for a dung beetle biodiversity-monitoring program. He will attend the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, and work at several research field stations nationwide. Monitoring the introduction of dung beetles to the country will help Jones answer questions related to his doctoral research in Washington. He also has plans for his down time. An avid surfer and mountaineer, Jones hopes to find time for both between his research and academics.

An added benefit of his dung beetle research has been the chance to learn more about farming. Jones grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta and didn't become interested in agriculture until he came to GWU and planted a huge garden on the farm of Kelly Brame, GWU assistant director of student activities.

"Spending six months of the year living in a van from California to British Columbia has been an eye-opening experience for me. Getting to know so many farmers and farm management philosophies really broadened my idea of what sustainability and conservation agriculture can look like," Jones assessed. "I've learned a ton from the people I've worked with on this project, including both farmers and collaborators. I've also gotten to know both the geographic and cultural landscapes of the west coast a whole lot better."

Supported by the U.S. Congress and partner nations, Fulbright is the most widely recognized and prestigious international exchange program in the world. Participants are chosen for their academic merit and leadership potential. The Fulbright Program operates in over 160 countries worldwide. Approximately 8,000 grants are awarded annually. [Click here for more information about the Fulbright Program.](#)

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University provides exceptional educational opportunities within a Christian environment, preparing students to think critically, to succeed professionally, and to serve faithfully as members of their local and global communities.