

# BRANCHING OUT

## THE US FOREST SERVICE INTERNATIONAL VISITOR PROGRAM

### HIGHLIGHTS

february 2012

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The US Forest Service International Visitor Program (IVP) facilitates participation in a wide variety of professional and educational exchanges, which encourage scientific collaboration and discovery, increase intercultural understanding, and promote cooperation among people of many cultures and countries.

### SPOTLIGHT:

#### **RUBY SEITZ AND SUSAN O'DONOHUE -- NATURE WATCH PROJECT AT WILLAMETTE NATIONAL FOREST**

In this issue of Spotlight, we are featuring Ruby Seitz, a USFS wildlife biologist and her current international visitor, Susan O'Donohoe, an Irish ecologist and the latest participant in the International Visiting Wildlife Biologist Program. Ruby works on the McKenzie River Ranger District in the Willamette National Forest. She is the coordinator for the Nature Watch Project, which is a conservation education program for local schools and communities. Susan is also assisting with other efforts, such as birdbanding, snag monitoring and archeological surveys.

#### **Ruby's Story**

I grew up southern California and later lived in New York as a child, until my family moved to Germany when I was 13. Both of my parents had emigrated from Germany to the US in the 50s and my dad needed to return back for work. After graduating from a German high school and trying a college program in Munich in business with an emphasis on tourism, I returned to the U.S. At that time, my career path took a completely different turn toward education, social work and recreation as I attended and worked my way through college, finally getting a



degree in Liberal Studies, Wildlife and a minor in Fisheries. At the same time, I always loved the outdoors and everything that had to do with it, which may have started during many camping trips as a child. I began working for the USFS as a volunteer for one summer on the Inyo National Forest, then volunteered for the San Bernardino National Forest helping a wildlife biologist who later moved to Oregon. Years later, I would move into his job when he moved on. I currently work as a wildlife biologist on the McKenzie River Ranger District of the Willamette National Forest. My job is diverse, challenging and full of surprises! I think anyone who takes their work in wildlife seriously will never run out of goals to learn and do more, improve habitats for our native wildlife, or build partnerships with the local and broader global community.

#### **How did you become involved in hosting international visitors?**

It was 1992 when Partners in Flight first started and we were asked if we

wanted to host a biologist from Mexico for a week. The goals of this new organization are to support migratory birds across international borders, and also connect people working with birds in different countries. We ended up hosting a wonderful biologist couple from Mexico for just 2 weeks, and it was much too short of a timeframe. Since that time, we have continued to host international biologists each year, first only from Mexico, then later including Central and South American applicants.

I think my ongoing interest in hosting international visitors may relate to my early upbringing and influences I had while living in Germany. Living in Europe, you are so close to other countries, their languages and cultures--even more so now than when I lived there in the 70s. I also spent six months living and working in France and have visited several different countries including Spain, Portugal, Italy, Austria, Denmark, Holland, Sweden, Great Britain, Mexico, Costa Rica, Bolivia, New Zealand, and Canada. I love to connect with people from different countries, cultures, and work on improving my foreign language skills. I'm fluent in German, thanks to my parents who spoke it even while we lived here in the U.S., and speak some French and Spanish. I'm having great fun passing on German to my 7-year old daughter who also attends a public French language immersion school. My partner Gary hears so much German he cannot help but continue to assimilate some.

### ***What is your favorite part of hosting?***

I am most enthusiastic about the international cultural connections and experiencing how wildlife biologists really are the same deep down in their spirits, no matter where they come from. Whilst our countries are unique, many of the issues are the same. This project gives me a wonderful feeling because I can honestly say that for many of our past volunteers it was such a valuable experience and helped them either get a grant or job in their home country, or get into graduate school. I also love how the visiting wildlife biologists connect with so many people while they are here, and how some of my coworkers or other people in the community have shown genuine interest in meeting our new visitors from other countries. I hope to stay in touch with many of the people I have hosted throughout their lives, and it's been fascinating to see what careers many of them have gone on to.

### ***What are your favorite stories or experiences?***

Which ones?! In the late 90s I visited two of our past volunteers in Mexico and had amazingly memorable experiences working with them in their country. Abel Rubalcava's university class was doing an ornithology field trip south of Cuernavaca that I participated in. Angelica Estrada was at an archeological site in southern Mexico near the Guatemalan border with a team from the University in Mexico City to do comprehensive wildlife surveys of the area before opening up a new archeological site Yaxchilan, an ancient Maya City, for more visitors. I was able to stay at their camp on the Usumacinta River and assist with these surveys for several days amidst the archeological ruins.

### **Susan's Story**

I am from Dublin, Ireland. In 2001 I graduated with a Bachelors Degree in German and Historical Studies. This was a four year degree which involved me living and studying in Tuebingen, southern Germany for a year. Then I completed a Postgraduate Higher Diploma in Montessori Education in 2003. Since then (for the last eight years) I have been working as a Montessori teacher in Dublin. After three years I became the manager of the school also. I really enjoy working with under six year olds and learn something new every day. In February 2011 I graduated with a Diploma in Field Ecology which I did through distance learning while teaching. I loved every minute of this course especially designing and doing my own research project. While doing it I also took an evening course in Ornithology. I have always been passionate about the environment and conservation and have been volunteering for many years with community projects. Projects I was involved with include bird surveys and educational work for BirdWatch Ireland, volunteering with the Red Kite Reintroduction Project run by the National Parks and Wildlife Services, vegetation restoration projects for Conservation Volunteers Ireland and birdbanding on the weekends for the British Trust for Ornithology.



**What has it meant to you personally and professionally to have this experience?**

Personally, I see this as a wonderful opportunity to travel, meet new people and learn about a different culture. The people on the district are so friendly and have made me feel welcome from the beginning. Also I really enjoy meeting the kids in schools and learning from them. I feel very privileged to be in a position to teach, motivate and hopefully inspire them. Professionally, this is a wonderful opportunity for me to learn new skills. I was particularly excited to run six birdbanding sites on the Willamette National Forest this summer. Although I had banded before I moved here I now feel a lot more experienced than I did when I left home. Some of the activities I have been lucky to do include fish surveys, bird surveys, archaeological surveys, habitat restoration projects, hydrological surveys, mammal trapping and educational work.

**What has been the most gratifying part of this experience so far?**

Many things; working with and learning about birds, teaching kids in schools, and making friendships with great people.

**How will this experience help you when you return home?**

I will have invaluable experience behind me in the area I wish to work in. I hope to work either with the National Parks and Wildlife Services as a wildlife conservation ranger or as a project leader with BirdWatch Ireland. I will be able to bring a fresh approach to wildlife conservation in Ireland thanks to my experiences here in Oregon.

**CULTURE CORNER**

Culture defines the way each of us looks at the world, and it impacts personal and professional relationships in many ways. Having a basic understanding of how cultural adaptation works can have a positive impact on intercultural experiences.

**Defining Culture and Dealing with Culture Shock**

While “culture” is an abstract concept, it is generally defined as ideas or ways of thinking that are shared by members of a given group. You may have heard it described using the metaphor of an iceberg. The image is appropriate because the things that we can observe about a cultural group on the surface—like dress, food, language, behaviors, habits, and appearance—only represent a small portion of what it means to be a part of that group.

Culture shock might be explained as the combination of physical and psychological reactions one might have when experiencing drastic change in a new environment. It can result from breakdowns in communication, clashes of values, a loss of control or feelings of incompetence, and the disappointments or surprises that come from not having one’s expectations met. Sometimes, the cultural attributes you bring with you may seem to clash or “collide” with those of the U.S. (your “host culture”), either above or below the surface.



**Common Symptoms of Culture Shock**

- Fatigue
- Difficulty sleeping
- Minor headaches or upset stomach
- Homesickness
- Boredom
- Sudden irritability or frustration
- Feelings of anger or negative feelings toward the host culture
- Withdrawal from social interaction
- Loneliness
- Mood swings
- Sadness

If you experience some or all of these symptoms, you are not alone. Some ways to overcome these difficulties are: eat well, get enough sleep, exercise regularly, keep yourself busy and try new things, and talk about your feelings with someone you trust.

Nearly all individuals living and working outside their home countries experience culture shock to some degree. If you find that your experience is overwhelming, we encourage you to speak to your colleagues or to call a member of the IVP Team so that we can help you through this difficult period.

## WHAT'S NEW

### MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL TEAMS UP WITH THE USFS FOREST PRODUCTS LABORATORY

Baseball is now a safer sport thanks to an unlikely partnership between Major League Baseball (MLB), the governing organization of America's national pastime, and the U.S. Forest Service Forest Products Laboratory (FPL). Over the past 3 years, the FPL-MLB partnership has led to significant changes in design and manufacturing standards for wooden baseball bats.

The 2008 baseball season saw an all-time high in injuries. In that year alone, more than 2,800 maple or ash wood baseball bats broke or shattered upon impact with the ball, causing a variety of injuries to players, coaches and fans. The Forest Products Lab, known for its innovative wood research and solutions, was uniquely equipped to analyze the problem and make recommendations.

The MLB Safety and Health Advisory Committee collected thousands of broken bats and turned them over to Dave Kretschmann, research engineer at the Forest Products Laboratory, located in Madison, Wisconsin. Kretschmann teamed up with Dr. James A. Sherman, professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Massachusetts, and Clark N. Morris, professor of statistics at Harvard University, to determine the cause and devise a solution to the broken bat problem.

The first two years of research focused primarily on the effect of wood type, wood density, and slope of grain on bat integrity. "Slope of grain" in this case refers to the location at which the ball impacts the bat relative to the grain pattern of the piece of wood.

The findings in 2008 and 2009 indicated that slope of grain is a greater factor in bat breakage than the type of wood that was used. Consequently, the researchers recommended several changes in the bat manufacturing process, including the placement of a clear finish 18 inches up the handle on faintly-grained maple and birch bats, as well as small ink dots that bleed slightly to show the grain pattern. These features, along with the placement of the large manufacturer's trademark on the edge grain side of the bat,

make it easier for the player to discern the strongest part of the bat and, therefore, where the ball should impact the bat. With the trademark of the bat on the edge grain side, players are instructed to hit the ball on the opposite, face grain side, which results in fewer instances of multi-piece breakage in bats made from all types of wood.

In 2010, researchers addressed wood dryness, which often occurs during the manufacturing process, as well as bat design and geometry. They studied the bat strength and integrity of both traditional bats and more modern bat designs, which tend to have higher failure rates. The research confirmed what bat manufacturers and baseball players already know. It takes an exceptional piece of wood to create a baseball bat. It is extremely difficult for manufacturers to find a raw dowel, or "billet", with the ideal ratio of grain, weight, moisture, and density to produce a high-quality traditional-style bat. More modern bat designs, such as the "brick-and-toothpick" style, which is heavily weighted toward the front with a thin handle, are even more difficult to manufacture. Only one or two billets out of a thousand will have the appropriate ratio of wood characteristics to make a strong bat.



By taking all of these factors into account and placing limits on bat geometry, wood density, and manufacturing techniques to prevent excessive drying, MLB was able to further reduce the instances of bat breakage in the past two years.

The FPL-MLB partnership has produced impressive results. After the first round of FPL research team recommendations was implemented, MLB saw a 30% decrease in shattered bats over the course of the 2009 baseball season. The trend has continued throughout 2010 and 2011. The future of one of America's favorite sports and the safety of baseball fans and players in all leagues has been forever impacted by the cooperative work of the Forest Products Laboratory and Major League Baseball.

For more information on the research of the USFS Forest Products Laboratory, visit the website at: [www.fpl.fs.fed.us](http://www.fpl.fs.fed.us).

## FACES OF THE INTERNATIONAL VISITOR PROGRAM



from left to right: Rima, Kristin, Brenda, Emily and Misty

### **MISTY**

#### ***Where are you from?***

I grew up right outside Atlanta, GA and every time somebody hears me say “y’all” I am reminded that I am indeed from the South! As a result of having grown up in the South I do love a good sweet tea and still have not gotten used to cold weather.

#### ***What is your educational/work background?***

I received my Bachelor’s degrees from the University of Georgia in History and Social Science Education and loved going to a big school in a small college town. I then moved abroad and taught English in the south of Spain, where I had the great opportunity to teach students of all ages and all levels, while also improving my own language skills. After teaching for a year I returned to the States to pursue my Master’s degree in International Education at George Washington University in Washington DC. While receiving my graduate degree I also worked at the GW Elliott School Office of Graduate Admissions for a year and a half. A few months after completing my degree I joined the International Visitors Team at the US Forest Service-International Programs Office.

#### ***What brought you to IP?***

I saw the job listed on my graduate program list-serv and was intrigued by the exchange program possibilities within the Forest Service.

#### ***What is your favorite part of being on the IVP team?***

I enjoy knowing that we all work together as a team. We can depend on each other, which is a great feeling. Each individual on the IVP team has different strengths and brings unique perspectives and ideas to the team.

#### ***Fun facts about you/hobbies.***

1. I have traveled to 6 of the 7 continents so it looks like I will need to now plan a trip to Antarctica!
2. I teach ESL to newly-arrived immigrants once a week and it is an extremely rewarding experience.
3. I am an SEC college football fan (Go Dawgs!)

### **KRISTIN**

#### ***Where are you from?***

South Bend, Indiana

#### ***What is your educational/work background?***

I studied Political Science as an undergraduate at University of Notre Dame, and got an MA in International Affairs at George Washington University. Prior to working at the Forest Service, I worked mostly with a company in DC called Envision EMI, which designs and runs experiential education programs for students ranging in age from elementary school through university. I managed Envision’s short-term study abroad programs in Australia, South Africa and China. On the International Visitors Program team, I work mostly with the budgets and accounting.

#### ***What brought you to IP?***

Serendipity! I saw the job announcement when IP’s Visitor Program was growing and needed extra hands. Working here has been a little bit of a change from my previous job in that I bring international visitors here to the United States instead of facilitating US students who are going overseas. It has been rewarding to help facilitate cultural exchange and share my country with other people.

#### ***What is your favorite part of being on the IVP team?***

My favorite part of the IVP team is working and meeting so many interesting and diverse people. Not only do I get to interact with people from all over the world, but I have the opportunity to interact with hosts from all over the country. It is a good reminder of the cultural diversity within the United States. I hope our international visitors get a chance to travel a bit around the United States while they are here so they can experience the regional differences themselves.

#### ***Fun facts about you/hobbies:***

I am an avid soccer player and fan. I have been playing soccer since the age of 7. One of the best parts about living in DC is that there are a lot of sports leagues here with a lot of participation, so I am able to still play soccer pretty competitively.

## **EMILY**

### ***Where are you from?***

I grew up in northeastern Ohio, near the city of Cleveland.

### ***What is your educational/work background?***

In 2003 I completed my bachelor's degree in International Studies with focuses in Communication and the Western Europe region at American University in Washington, DC. I also earned a Spanish translation certificate and studied French and Dutch. I was lucky to be able to study abroad twice, once in Paraguay when I was in high school and once in college in Belgium. I started teaching English as a Second Language in college, and continued to do that while I lived in the Netherlands for about a year. I returned to the U.S. to get a master's degree in Spanish, which I completed in 2007. From 2006 until starting with IP, I taught ESL and Spanish and worked as an advisor and admissions coordinator for international students at Howard Community College English Language Institute.

### ***What brought you to IP?***

After working in higher education for quite a while, I was ready to try something new and started at IP at the beginning of November. I love the outdoors, learning about and working with people from different cultures, and am interested in how governments and NGOs collaborate internationally on global environmental issues. Working with IP team sounded like the perfect opportunity to combine many of my interests.

### ***What is your favorite part of being on the IVP team?***

So far, I have really appreciated the warm welcome and helpful attitudes of my team members and of everyone in the office. I know as time goes on, I will be discovering even more "favorite" things.

### ***Fun facts about you/hobbies.***

I enjoy traveling, rock climbing, music, and being outside. I studied classical voice since I was 11 years old, and lately I've been singing in a rock band, which has been an exciting change for me. I also love learning other languages.

## **BRENDA**

### ***Where are you from?***

I grew up in Oklahoma, where the wind does "come sweepin' down the plain," like the song says...oftentimes in the form of a tornado! Oklahoma isn't very well known to many, but I can attest it is one of the friendliest places in the United States. I now live in Arlington, VA and I truly

love the urban-suburban mix. But, I must admit, there are days that I miss the wide open skies of Oklahoma and what are some of the most beautiful sunsets in the world.

### ***What is your educational/work background?***

I studied Journalism and Advertising as an undergraduate then later got my M.A. in Sociology/International Training, Education and Development. My career path was heavily influenced by an early voluntary service experience in the Canary Islands, which eventually led to managing international voluntary service programs and managing J-I Exchange Programs for the Council on International Educational Exchange. I also taught in France, served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Thailand, and I was on Peace Corps staff in Washington, DC, Slovakia and Macedonia.

### ***What brought you to IP?***

Prior to coming to IP, I worked at Oklahoma State University and managed the university's J-I Exchange Visitor Program and international sponsored student and scholar programs. I was happy to be close to home after several years of living overseas and I was able to catch up on the latest developments in J-I programs. That experience eventually led me back to Washington and IP to help the office establish and develop its own J-I Exchange Visitor Program.

### ***What is your favorite part of being on the IVP team?***

The team! I am so fortunate to work with such wonderful, supportive people. We work very hard, but we also have a lot of fun. My colleagues are the greatest!

### ***Fun facts about you/hobbies.***

I enjoy gardening, the arts, nature, and hiking with my dog. My true passion is working with glass. I design and create stained glass windows. I also work with fused, kiln-formed glass. This past year, I took part in a sculptural development workshop in which I created a sculpture made from recycled steel, cast aluminum and cast glass. To my surprise, the piece made it into a juried gallery show - my first ever! After I retire, I hope I can dedicate more time to my artwork and become a small business owner.

## **RIMA**

### ***Where are you from?***

I am native to the Nation's Capitol but also from Lebanon. I have grown up both in Washington D.C. and Lebanon.

### ***What is your education and work background?***

I have a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Psychology from

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## **Please Share Your Stories!**

We would like to invite everyone to share photos and stories about yourselves, your programs, and the exchange experiences you've had in the United States and abroad. Please submit your stories, pictures, ideas, and pointers to Brenda Dean at [bdean@fs.fed.us](mailto:bdean@fs.fed.us).

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## **Disclaimer**

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Marymount University. Prior to working at the Forest Service, I worked with Georgetown University as an International Student/Scholar Advisor. My work there consisted of meeting and advising new international scholars on a daily basis. I helped them adjust culturally as well as maintain their legal status in the United States. My current position with the International Visitor Program team is very similar to my work at Georgetown University as I assist visitors and researchers who come to the U.S. to pursue their research.

## **What brought you to IP?**

I was very interested in the good work that International Programs was doing both domestically and internationally. I had a desire to be part of this great team! It has been a pleasure to assist hosts and visitors in their "international" experience.

## **What is your favorite part of being on the IVP team?**

Working with such an amazing team! Not just the people in our office in Washington D.C. but with each person I interact with to make this whole process a success. There is a lot of cultural diversity within USDA and I feel privileged to be a part of it.

## **Fun facts about you/hobbies:**

I am an avid traveler. Lately, I have focused a lot of my travels domestically as the U.S. is so large and diverse! I feel that I must visit all of the different cities and states to have a true understanding of United States culture.

## **ON THE HORIZON**

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### **Upcoming US Holidays and Special Occasions**

February 2nd	Groundhog Day
February 5th	National (American) Football League Super Bowl
February 14th	Valentine's Day
February 20th	Presidents' Day (celebrating Lincoln and Washington's birthdays)
March 8th	International Women's Day
March 11th	Daylight Savings Time Begins (Set all clocks 1 hour ahead!)
March 17th	St. Patrick's Day
March 20th	First Day of Spring
April 6th	Passover / Good Friday
April 7th	World Health Day
April 8th	Easter Sunday
April 22nd	Earth Day
April 25th	Administrative Professionals' Day

If you are a visitor to the US, ask your American hosts, friends and colleagues how they celebrate these holidays. You can also find more information on the internet. Here are some suggestions for where to look:

- <http://www.usafederalholidays.com/>
- <http://www.calendar-365.com/holidays/2012.html>
- <http://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/>

Hosts, we encourage you to use this opportunity to share an aspect of American culture with your visitor(s)!