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From Lab to Prairie

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From Lab to Prairie

Anna Groves '11 continues her environmental studies with help from NSF fellowship.

In March, Anna Groves '11 (shown at right) received a prestigious National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship. The fellowship will cover Groves' tuition for three years of her doctoral program at Michigan State University, along with a stipend. Only 2,000 such fellowships were awarded from over 13,000 applications.

Anna began pursuing her Ph.D. in plant biology at Michigan State after graduating magna cum laude from Illinois Wesleyan. She was also named outstanding student in environmental studies at IWU and was selected Phi Beta Kappa.

While at Illinois Wesleyan, Anna conducted a research project analyzing population levels of red-tailed hawks and American kestrels and their relation to latitude using five years of winter raptor survey data.

During her time at IWU, she also worked four seasons in Illinois and Nevada as a research technician or field assistant “where I became fascinated by the way in which the plant community acts as an interesting and practical foundation for projects aimed at restoration and conservation,” says Anna.

“My summer work with the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory has had the strongest influence in bringing me to where I am today. My inspiration for my current research questions definitely stems from the patterns I saw in the natural areas in Illinois that we were surveying.”

R. Given Harper, George C. and Ella Beach Lewis Endowed Chair of Biology at Illinois Wesleyan, served as her undergraduate research advisor. “Anna is a very impressive student, and she is very deserving of this prestigious fellowship,” says Harper. “I am confident she has the potential to make significant contributions in restoration ecology.”

At Michigan State, Anna studies plant biology in the Brudvig Lab. The lab's central research uses basic ecological concepts to inform restoration practices, while using restoration as a system to learn more about ecology.

“I'm broadly interested in why restoration projects don't always turn out the way we want them to,” says Anna. “If we can't rebuild an ecosystem, then we don't know enough about its ecology.”



Anna Groves '11 earned a fellowship that will cover her tuition for three years as she seeks a Ph.D. in plant biology.

Anna's research focuses on factors considered to have a negative impact on the plant community, such as invasive species or agricultural land use legacies, as well as those considered to be positive, such as ecological restoration and land management. "I hope to better understand how these factors work together to mold plant community composition and function in order to promote effective land management decisions," she says.

Among the questions she is examining is whether the establishment phase of a restoration (clearing existing vegetation and then seeding a prairie, for example) or the later ongoing management (burning or manual brush removal in the prairie) has a greater impact on restoration outcomes.

"Both are known to be important, but sorting out the effects of each and the interaction between the two will have important implications for land managers with limited resources," she says.

After completing her Ph.D., Anna says she would like to continue doing research for a nonprofit or perhaps a government agency.

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