

SWOSU Biology Team Studies Bees in Mexico

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Southwestern Oklahoma State University junior biology student Tim Stein (center) of Enid recently conducted ethnobiological research on bees in San Luis Acatlán along the Pacific Coast of the state of Guerrero, Mexico. Stein worked with Tino Teodoro (left) and Esteban Castillo, two San Luis Acatlan consultants who are fluent in both Spanish and Mixtec.

Southwestern Oklahoma State University junior biology student Tim Stein of Enid and Biology Professor Dr. Victor H. Gonzalez recently spent time in Mexico doing ethnobiological research on bees with Dr. Jonathan Amith, an anthropologist from the Smithsonian Institution who has been working in Mexico for the last decade.

The SWOSU pair from Weatherford worked in Yoloxóchitl, a Mixtec speaking community in San Luis Acatlán along the Pacific Coast of the state of Guerrero, Mexico.

For Stein, the trip was an exciting adventure. He had never been to Mexico nor worked with an anthropologist. He was extremely pleased with this experience.

“The people were very nice and our consultants were very interesting and knowledgeable,” Stein said. “They knew a lot not only about bees, but about other insects and plants.”

Stein and Gonzalez worked side by side in the field with Tino Teodoro and Esteban Castillo, two local consultants who are fluent in both Spanish and Mixtec. The SWOSU team was trying to learn how this community classify and use local native bees. According to Stein, bees are extremely important to the rural areas of Mexico because of the large amount of farming done there and because some species provide honey and wax.

“Anthropologists work different than biologists,” Stein said. “We approached the same subject from different perspectives and we were able to get a lot done.”

In addition to being the most important pollinators of both wild and cultivated plants, Gonzalez said bees are also deeply embedded in the cultural history of many societies. Archeological and anthropological records indicate that bees were, and remain, an integral part of the cultural knowledge of many indigenous peoples around the world.

Stein’s participation in the trip was made possible by the SWOSU Biology Department, National Science Foundation and the Endangered Language Documentation Program. Stein’s experience is another example of the continuous effort by the SWOSU Biology Department to provide opportunities for students to be involved in national as well as international research experiences. Last year, Lauren Blatzheim, freshman student from Norman, spent eight weeks with Gonzalez conducting research on bees in Turkey and Greece.

Stein will present his research at SWOSU's Scholarly Activity Fair coming up on Tuesday, April 15, in the Memorial Student Center Ballroom on the Weatherford campus. He is also co-author of two scientific publications derived from this research.