Hi, my name is Seth! I’m currently in my senior year at at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville, pursuing a B.S. in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology with Honors. I got my start doing research in an extracurricular STEM program called the School for Science and Math at Vanderbilt (SSMV) when I was in high school. Since then, I’ve worked on several projects that range in species, from bonobos to plants & invertebrates. I’m currently part of the Derryberry lab where I’m working on an independent research project examining the impact of atmospheric temperature on the social interactions of male-male pairs of zebra finches.

My original research interest in animal behavior started with a project in collaboration with the Ape Cognition & Conservation Initiative investigating prosocial behaviors in bonobos. Behavior has remained a prominent area of interest, primarily because I enjoy exploring the versatility of behavior in different environmental and social contexts. I love learning about new organisms, concepts in ecology, and research techniques. Most recently, I have developed my understanding of thermal physiology methods like respirometry and thermal imaging as part of a postdoctoral project with Dr. Juan Zuluaga. Ultimately, I want to pursue questions dealing with how animals use behavior and other adaptive strategies to respond to environmental change.

Beyond research itself, I think it’s very important to get people involved in nature and outreach. After concluding my prosociality project with bonobos, I collaborated with other SSMV students to create lessons for the Ape Initiative’s education zone. For several years I have also been volunteering at their summer STEM program for high school students. This year, I got involved at my own university by joining the UTK Naturalist Club’s leadership council where I help organize and run events to get people out in nature! I want to keep putting a focus on outreach and engagement as I continue my academic career.

I’m currently looking for MS and PhD programs for Fall 2026! In my graduate studies I want to continue developing my knowledge at the intersection of behavior and physiology to answer questions about how organisms respond to environmental changes. I have research experience with multiple avian species, but I would also welcome the opportunity to expand to other organisms such as fish, mammals, herps, and invertebrates. If you think I’d be a good fit in your lab or want to chat about research and science outreach, please contact me at sshaw33@vols.utk.edu.