Name:

Tagline: Work and live smarter; what is the question?;

Static Website Setup

* Expectations/ things to think about
  + What to improve – get a website
  + Some freelance website samples
    - What do you like/ what do you NOT like?
  + Color choices
  + Decision person – me
  + Create a mockup (a drawing) -> approve -> finalize
  + Pictures
  + Motivations

Cover

Sticky footer content

Website write-up

# Home

Hello, I’m Idhi.

I am a biology and writing tutor for university students. I also work as a freelance reviewer and technical editor.

As a tutor, I aim to teach learners to think critically about their subject and their work. Learners can apply concepts only if they understand it. To encourage creative and critical thinking, I explain concepts by asking questions to determine their understanding and making the concepts relevant to them/their work.

In biology, my expertise is in:

* + Ecology and Evolution
  + Animal Behavior
  + Evolution
  + Behavioral ecology
  + Wetland ecology
  + Mountain ecology
  + Natural resources management
  + Basic ecology statistics.

As a writing tutor/reviewer/technical editor, I consider and provide feedback on:

* + Sentence structure
  + Paragraph structure
  + Grammatical issues
  + Flow of arguments
  + Flow of logic
  + Strength of arguments/logic used
  + Overall essay coherence
  + In-text citations
  + Reference list
  + Making academic presentations
  + Among others.

About me:

When I was fifteen, I fell in love with a book– “On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection” by Charles Darwin. Since then, <em>ecology and evolution </em> has been a passion. After getting a bachelor’s degree in biology and psychology from the US, I headed to Thailand for my first Masters’ degree in Natural Resources Management. My field site was in Cambodia – a beautiful (and hot!) country (click the link: prickly plant management for my Masters’ research paper).

Then, I returned home to Nepal. For the next four years, I worked at national and international levels in various organizations – UNDP (the project titled ‘Conservation and Sustainable Use of Wetlands in Nepal’), ICIMOD (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development as a junior consultant in Nepal) and the Ramsar Convention Secretariat in Switzerland (IUCN). In these jobs, I reviewed local and international site assessments, community level management plans, project proposals and final project reports. When I went to the field site and talked to the local community members and leaders, I started to realise the value of teaching ecology and conservation to young adults (and therefore, majority of the population in a few years). If they understand the impacts we have on the world, then we can work together to come up with solutions to mitigate the effects of our current trajectory (yes, climate change).

And so, began my journey to pursue a second Masters’ degree, at the University of Calgary, while working as a Teaching Assistant (TA). If you are interested in learning about my research (in brief), click the link: why I spent years following bighorn sheep. Working as a TA ignited a second passion–<em>teaching and learning</em>. Now, I aim to merge the two passions together by working as a Tutor in Biology and Academic Writing for university students.

Most students are keen to improve their writing and critical thinking skills. I know this because I have graded and provided feedback on student assignments over several years. I kept track of student grades and found that, on average, by the end of each semester, the quality of student assignment improved by 15-25%. That is, at least, an entire letter-grade improvement! And it’s just based on my feedback—on their writing, logic and use of evidence—and their effort in addressing the feedback! More recently, as a writing tutor, I have been impressed with student desire to understand how to be better writers and dedication to self-improvement.

And I… I like working behind the scenes to help other people learn, develop their thinking and be successful. This is, also, why I enjoy reviewing and editing other people’s work. It’s not just about my work; it’s not just about your work. It’s about the both of us working collaboratively to make a coherent whole.

Working as a TA (and now as a Writing Tutor) I give students feedback on their assignments and writing. This feedback helps improve their critical thinking, presentation of ideas and communication skills. I know that most students are keen to improve because I have worked with them. Each semester, I kept track of student grades … and, on average, the quality of student assignment improved by 15-25%!

Contact:

If you want to work collaboratively, I’d love to hear from you! I am available for freelance projects and full-time employment.

Samridhi Rijal (Idhi)

[samridhir@gmail.com](mailto:samridhir@gmail.com)

Link to: LinkedIn

Tags: Research, Reflections, Thesis, Paper, SAGES poster

1st Post entry.

**What is this and why am I doing it?**

Tags: Personal; Ecology and Evolution; Higher Education

Welcome! This post provides some background information and elaborates on my motivations. As you could see under the ‘musings’ header on the main page, this blog is divided (or, will be when I add more posts to it) into three categories—ecology and evolution, higher education and personal.

Each new piece of writing (post) that I upload will fall under, at least, one of these three categories. For example, I am a recent MSc graduate specializing in Ecology. When I talk about my research, it may fall under ‘ecology and evolution’ and ‘personal’. During this time, I also worked as a Teaching Assistant and so, when I reflect on those experiences, the article may fall under ‘higher education’ and ‘personal’. But, if I post an article about my experiences living in Nepal, Thailand, Canada or any of the other countries that I’ve lived in or visited, then, those will only be ‘personal’.

For most posts under ‘ecology and evolution’ and ‘higher education’ categories, I will summarise a journal article and reflect on it. I will use a formal and professional tone in these articles. Posts under ‘personal’ will be reflections on my experiences. These articles will be more friendly, and so I will use a casual tone.

My main motivation for starting this blog is to share the ideas in articles with anyone and everyone who has an internet connection and a budding interest in these topics.

2nd Post entry.

**An overview my Masters’ research – animal behavior and parasites.**

Tags: Research; Ecology; Reflections; Parasites; bighorn sheep; season; sex; activity

A young ranger was explaining how he tracked tigers. In the middle of a sentence, he bent down so I could only see a part of him on-screen. My eyes were glued to the T.V.—why did documentaries do this? What did he find off-screen?

He turned around and showed me what he had picked up–tiger poo. I lost interest. As a 10-year old, I remember thinking ‘well, that’s one thing I will never do!’ Fast-forward about 15 years, and here I am, a recent master’s degree graduate with three years of experience collecting and analysing bighorn sheep poo. (Life lesson: Never say never!)

Poo, or feces, is fascinating. Not only can the freshness indicate how long ago an individual may have passed by, but, if you analyse the feces under a microscope, you can learn what individuals eat and what gastrointestinal parasites they may have. I was interested in the latter. I wanted to investigate the patterns of parasite infections in bighorn sheep and whether these patterns affected how much time an individual devoted to different activities.

So, I collected fresh bighorn sheep poo, by observing them going about their daily business (and recording it) and making note of all the places that each individual could have defecated. After the sheep left the area, either my assistant or I went to collect the feces. If it was easy to squish the poo pellets between our fingers, we knew that it was fresh, and so, we collected it. It wasn’t too bad – we wore gloves… except when we forgot to.

After we collected the feces, we analysed the samples. Well, my amazing assistants processed the samples and I counted the number of parasite eggs in each microscope slide (and, therefore, in each individual).

Figure 1. An example datasheet for samples collected on May 26, 2017 which were processed and analysed on May 28, 2017 by my assistant, Camille—CVC—and me—SR.

After a couple of years of doing this, I finally had answers for my questions:

1. Does season affect the number of parasite eggs that an individual shed in their feces? (spoiler alert: It does… but the parasite matters as well)
2. Does the sex of the infected individual affect the number of parasites eggs that an individual shed in their feces? (spoiler alert: Yes! And so, does the season. The relationship between season and host-sex on parasite egg count is fascinating!)
3. Does the parasite egg count affect how much time an individual devoted to different activities? (spoiler alert: Meh, not really)

If you want to read my thesis (either the full or any part of 131 pages 😉), click “HERE”.

3rd Post entry.

TP

4th Post entry.

SAGES

5th Post entry.

ECO and EVOL summary – Poulin 1996

6th Post entry.

H Ed – critical thinking

7th Post entry.

ECO and EVOL summary – Poulin 1996

8th Post entry.

H Ed – critical thinking

![A screenshot of a cell phone

Description automatically generated]()

I, also, like to talk. In case that was ever in doubt. :D

I prefer email. [samridhir@gmail.com](mailto:samridhir@gmail.com)

# Musings:

A close up of a green field

Description automatically generatedBased on secondary research, personal experiences (i.e., anecdotes), observations and discussions with other professionals, I think…

Biology –

Higher Education –

# Experiences

A picture containing outdoor, old, photo, small

Description automatically generated

My experiences can be divided into two categories – biology and teaching. Mostly working in conservation, and teaching biology and academic writing.

Yea, that’s right! I’ve been places… mostly, Asia and North America, but I’ve managed to sneak in couple of trips to Europe as well. And, I’m not exaggerating – Italian food is AMAZING! My friend and I went to Italy for a trip during Christmas break. And wow. I mean, Wow. The food, the weather… it was all amazing. Before I came to Calgary, I was actively looking for jobs in Rome because I loved the food. I wanted to relocate to Italy. I thought Italian food was hyped up and it was nothing that great. I was extremely pleased to find out that I was wrong. Italian food really is that amazing!

# Travels

A close up of a map

Description automatically generated

Green – For fun

Red – For work and studies

Tags:

1. Research
2. Higher Education
3. Ecology
4. Evolution
5. COVID-19
6. Personal Ruminations
7. Critical Thinking
8. Online vs in-person
9. Climate change
10. Conservation
11. Distance learning

Key words/key concepts

1. Working memory:
2. Chunking:
3. Critical thinking: broad concept—an individual’s ability to critically reflect on personal experiences and think scientifically within their discipline. In general, it is defined as the ability/cognitive skill that allows an individual to logically analyse and evaluate arguments (Facione 2000; Giancarlo and Facione 2001; Pithers and Soden 2000; Stupnisky et al 2008; Erikson and Erikson 2019). Researchers have further argued that it can also include an individual’s willingness and ability to clearly exchange ideas with others, including the ability to argue or seek clarification. Beyond the field increases ‘employability.’

Critical thinking in education is not about what conclusions student reach—it’s about how they reach them.

1. Creative thinking:
2. Ecology: the study of interactions between organisms and their physical environment.
3. Biotic: related to living things
4. Abiotic: related to non-living things
5. Zoology: the study of animal kingdom.
6. Evolution: very simply, the change in characteristics of a species over multiple generations.
7. Conservation: efficient use of resources
8. Preservation: maintaining resources in their original state
9. Climate change: Variations in climate patterns that, typically, last for longer than a decade.
10. Climate variability: variations in the characteristic of climate over shorter periods of time.
11. Diversity: variety; having different elements
12. Ecosystems: a biological community of organisms that interact with each other and their physical environments
13. Speciation: the evolutionary process by which populations develop characteristics that form a distinct species.
14. Haploid
15. Diploid
16. Adaptive radiation
17. Alpha diversity
18. Taxonomy
19. Paleozoic era
20. Cambrian period
21. Ordovician period
22. Biodiversity: the variety and variability of life in a given area (habitat, ecosystem, world)
23. Educational data mining:
24. Learning management systems:
25. Learning analytics:
26. Learning environments:
27. Technology:
28. Student engagement:
29. Learning:
30. Teaching:

When I was fifteen, I fell in love with a book– “On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection” by Charles Darwin. Since then, biology, more specifically, ‘ecology and evolution’ has been a passion. More recently, while pursuing a Master of Science degree (why I spent years chasing after bighorn sheep) at the University of Calgary, I worked as a Teaching Assistant (TA). This ignited a second passion–teaching and learning. Now, I aim to merge these two passions together by working as a Tutor in Biology and Academic Writing for university students.

Working as a TA (and, currently, as a Writing Tutor) I give students feedback on their assignments and writing. This feedback helps improve their critical thinking and writing. I know that most students are keen to improve because I have worked with them. Each semester, I kept track of student grades … and by the end of the semester, student assignment quality improved, on average, by 15-25%! Their assignments improved by, at least, an entire letter-grade! Just based on my feedback and their hard work!

This is why I enjoy teaching – it’s not just about me, it’s not just about you. It’s about the both of us, working collaboratively for your success.

It’s the same reason, I enjoy reviewing and editing documents for others (peers and colleagues). I enjoy working behind the scenes to help other people succeed. This means my success depends on your success. If you want to work collaboratively, I’d love to hear from you! :D

Personal stories:

Climate change:

Before I begin, I’d like to ask: What do you know about climate change? I’m curious. What do we know about climate change?

As an ecologist, I look for proximate causes that shape animal behavior. As an evolutionary biologist, I look for ultimate causes that shaped animal behavior. Merging the two, I recognise that tens of thousands of years of evolution has led to the organism in its current form.

“Survival of the fittest”

I’ll be honest, initially, I thought climate change (or global warming) was an important issue for the reasons that I was taught—starving polar bears stranded on a melting piece of ice, rising sea levels slowly encroaching into existing human settlements, and “weather irregularities”. But, then, I lost interest. When I started working in conservation, nothing seemed to be happening.

1st post: background and aim: Tags: Personal ruminations; Ecology and Evolution; Higher Education

Welcome! This post provides some background information and elaborates on my motivations . As you could see under the ‘musings’ header on the main page, this blog is divided (or, will be when I add more posts to it) into three categories—ecology and evolution, higher education and personal ruminations.

Each new piece of writing (post) that I upload will fall under, at least, one of these three categories. For example, I am a recent MSc graduate specializing in Ecology. When I talk about my research, it may fall under ‘ecology and evolution’ and ‘personal ruminations’. In graduate school, I also worked as a teaching assistant and so, if I reflect on my experiences as a TA, the article may fall under ‘higher education’ and ‘personal ruminations’. But, if I post an article about my experiences living in Nepal, Thailand, Canada or any of the other countries that I’ve lived in or visited, then, those will be personal and fall under ‘personal ruminations’.

For the ‘ecology and evolution’ and ‘higher education’ categories, I will summarise a journal article and reflect on it. I will be using a formal and professional tone in these articles.

Posts under ‘personal ruminations’ will be reflections on my experiences. These articles will be more friendly, and so I will use a casual tone. I don’t know whether I will be consistent in writing about and sharing my experiences. I don’t think it is the most fascinating thing to read… even if I can, easily, fill pages with my thoughts (no one has accused me of not talking enough \*grin\*). But, as with life, we’ll see what happens.

My main motivation for starting this blog is to have the ideas in articles be widely available, rather than being limited to academics and researchers. Until I formally studied the theory of evolution, I had no interest in biology. Studying about the digestive system, memorizing human anatomy and learning about reproduction never held any appeal for me. I want to share my interest so people have a better understanding of how interesting these fields (Eco and Evol, and Higher Ed) can be

very little that’ssettled

I didn’t enjoy taking biology courses until sophomore year at university and I want to share it with people.

As I’ve mentioned earlier, I could go on for DAYS, and PAGES about how many times, I’ve had a realization / reaffirmed my belief that biology is awesome. So, this is my attempt at restraining myself from fangirling over biology.

Research project in Cambodia

Have you ever lived in a country where there is only one person who speaks the same language as you, and who also refuses to talk to you about anything other than work? Yep, that was my main experience during the research project. It… gave me a lot of time to reflect on my life choices, made me go on facebook and prepared me for COVID-19 social distancing (although, I’m living with my bf, who HAS to talk to me, so it’s actually pretty good all things considered!).

Working and living in Switzerland

Living in Canada

Growing up in Nepal

Tags: Higher Education; Adult Education; Personal ruminations; Teaching philosophy

Why do ants always find their way into our homes and especially into my stack of chocolate? Why do tigers have large claws and teeth that maul deer? Why do wolves have packs? I spent hours wondering about the answers to these questions as I was growing up. I wanted to understand animal behavior; I wanted to understand the world.

Learning about the theory of evolution and survival of the fittest helped put everything into perspective. Ants went from being annoying creatures that got into everything in our house to fascinating creatures with incredible social structures and behaviors; tigers went from vicious killers to magnificent creatures struggling to survive; and wolves went from fluffy killers to pack animals with complex hierarchy. This new appreciation for the subject and outlook on life helped me realise just how much I wanted to teach this subject and communication/writing skills to others. When I started my Masters’ degree at the University of Calgary, I finally got the opportunity to work as a Teaching Assistant (TA). And I loved it—it was an absolute pleasure to see students grow and develop their understanding and writing skills over the semester.

Working as a TA in the scientific writing course, I motivated students by impressing on them the **value of developing** writing **skills**—regardless of who your employer is, everyone needs to write papers and reports and communicate effectively with one another. For some students that was motivation enough, but for others, they needed a more personal reason. They got their internal motivation when they had to write a final paper on a topic of their choosing. They wanted readers to understand what they were trying to say, and finally, started to engage with the material. They participated in tutorials and asked thoughtful questions during requested one-on-one meetings.

**Student choice** is also an important factor that affects learning. When I think back to my learning experience as an undergrad, the topics and discussions that I still remember are the topics that I <em>chose</em> to work on. These final projects gave me an opportunity to actively apply some of the concepts that we’d learned in the course. By the end, I was more motivated to learn than I had been at the beginning of the semester! Seeing the same experience reflected in my students made me appreciate the importance of giving students the freedom to choose their final projects/essays.

I challenged students to think outside of the material that they read, to question it, question the methodology and to **think critically** about the subject, rather than accepting it because it was published. For practice, I encouraged students to challenge my ideas. I turned it into a game and showed them that I welcomed their challenge to a) set an example and show them how to deal with challenges in a productive way and b) encourage a positive supportive environment where challenges were a way to help you develop your thinking. It worked! There was some hesitation in the earlier tutorials, but by the end, students had lively and fruitful discussions; they tried to understand where the other person was coming from and challenged each other’s thinking.

While I wanted to encourage a lively discussion, I also wanted to ensure that students were respectful of each other’s ideas and opinions. Creating this type of **safe environment** is crucial for **developing critical thinking skills**. So, in the first ten minutes of the first tutorial I made it very clear that the environment that I was trying to create was one of mutual respect and understanding–not just between the students and myself, but also between fellow students. While some students were eager to participate, it was a pain to get others to speak out. Initially, I thought they just needed some time to get used to each other and that they would start participating in a week or two. But, after three weeks, they were still hesitant. So, I asked them what I could do to encourage participation. A few students came up to me, after class, and mentioned that they were hesitant to speak out for the fear of offending people whose opinions differed from their own.

Taking what they had said into account, before beginning the fourth tutorial session, I reiterated that this was a safe space, but I added that the tutorial was also a **learning space**. We would start with the basic assumption that no one wanted to hurt or offend anyone else, and if they did, then we could discuss it in a mature and respectful manner to understand what was offensive, so that everyone in the class learns the what and the why. After this intervention, participation in the class increased by more than two-fold! The following year, when I taught the same course, I made sure that the students realised, from the get-go, that safe space also means that when you make a mistake, we work through it together. That year, participation was high in all sessions from the very beginning!

To summarize, my goal is for students to learn to **think critically** about any relevant topic and/or contemporary issue, consider the problem from **multiple perspectives** and make a strong case for their proposed solution. I also encourage students to be willing and flexible to adapt their views and plans based on valid arguments and recommendations, respectively—after all, **problem solving**, **flexibility** and **adaptability** are vital skills in any workplace.

Learning about the theory of evolution was like finally getting a drink of cool, refreshing water after hiking for six hours under the unrelenting sun—finally, the world made sense! I had been struggling to understand human and animal motivations and behaviors. Learning that it was about the survival of the fittest helped put everything into perspective. At its core, life for all creatures is about survival and reproduction. Ants went from being annoying creatures that got into everything in our house to fascinating creatures with incredible social structures and behaviors; and tigers went from being vicious killers to magnificent creatures struggling to survive. This new appreciation for the subject and outlook on life helped me realise how much I wanted to teach this subject to others. When I started my Masters’ degree at the University of Calgary, I finally got the opportunity to work as a Teaching Assistant (TA). And I loved it—it was an absolute pleasure to see students grow and develop their understanding and writing skills over the semester.

How did ants always find their way in our house and especially, my stack of chocolate? Why do tigers have large claws and teeth that maul deer? Questions like these haunted me as I was growing up.

Learning about the theory of evolution and survival of the fittest helped put everything into perspective. Ants went from being annoying creatures that got into everything in our house to fascinating creatures with complex social structures and behaviors; and tigers went from vicious killers to magnificent creatures struggling to survive. At the same time, finding answers to these questions led to more questions: Why are ants and tigers different? Why do ants have colonies, while tigers are loners?

Carefully thinking about the world around us as we question the things we see, hear and read leads us to thinking critically. Critical thinking as an essential skill that individuals need to develop.

Tags: Higher Ed; Personal Ruminations; SAGES poster

In 2019 year, I participated in the SAGES program that taught interested graduate students at UofC how to be a more responsive educator in STEM. ‘SAGES’ is an acronym with two other acronyms within it:

<a href=””>SAGES</a> = SoTL Advancing Graduate Education in STEM

SoTL = Scholarship of teaching and learning

STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

In the first semester, I learned the theoretical concepts behind teaching and learning. I learned how to provide feedback; align course learning outcomes and assignments; set learning objectives; actively engage students in their learning process; and the basics of how memory and learning works.

In 2019, I participated in the SAGES program. <a href=””>SAGES</a>§, an acronym with two other acronyms within it, is a program at the University of Calgary that teaches graduate students how to be a more responsive educator. In the first semester, we learned some theoretical concepts behind teaching and learning. We also learned how to provide feedback; align learning outcomes and assignments; set learning objectives; actively engage students in their learning process; and the basics of how memory and learning works.

In the second semester, we had to put what we had learned into practice. For the practicum, I developed a tutorial for the Conservation Biology course. In the previous year, I had worked as a TA for this course, and had identified a specific tutorial topic—hunting—that no one wanted to discuss. Most students were against hunting. Discussions around this topic were very flat—any ‘rebellion’ against the popular idea of ‘hunting bad’ was quickly squashed. I was, quite frankly, appalled that the students against hunting were not even interested in having a discussion. It seemed like their thinking was limited to ‘killing is bad, therefore hunting is bad.’

I wanted to broaden students’ perspectives and provide them with information about hunting from different perspectives so that students considered the biological, social, economic and political aspects of the topic and how it ties to conservation efforts. Only then, in my opinion, could they form an educated view.

My aim for the redesigned tutorial was to provide different perspectives on the topic (the full poster is below). During the tutorial session, students were randomly sorted into two groups – for or against hunting – and they had to debate the topic for their group. Astonishingly, for me at least, a substantial percentage of the class changed their minds about hunting after the in-class debate! And it went both ways – students who had previously been against hunting, were now more accepting of it, while students who had previously been for hunting, were now against it. Although, more students became more accepting of hunting. And I’m saying ‘more accepting’ because they still didn’t actively support it, but they understood the positive impacts that good hunting practices could have on conservation efforts. It was a conditional acceptance, not an unconditional approval.

Overall, students appeared to appreciate the complex nature of the issue under discussion and understand the importance of critical thinking and meaningful discussions. In the end, students learned the value of considering different perspectives when making decisions.

§ SAGES = SoTL Advancing Graduate Education in STEM

SoTL = Scholarship of teaching and learning

STEM = Science, Technology, Engineering and Math

90\_ryAN\_09

Teaching, educator development and student development

What I learned about managing a team as a Graduate Researcher and Teaching Assistant.

A snippet of life in the field as a researcher – 1 (yes, this could be a series)

Because I’ve done research in ecology, I could also go on for DAYS and PAGES about how amazing life in the field can be—

1. We’re hikin’ in the rain, just hikin’ in the rain

It was just a drizzle at first… but about two hours earlier, it had started raining in earnest. We had been hiking through Sheep River Provincial Park for the past six hours looking for any sign of sheep. It was late May and the rainwater was cold. <strong>The day was cold</strong>. I could feel the frigid water dripping down the ends of my purple waterproof jacket sleeves. I shivered as we walked between the trees wondering whether we should give up on the search for the day.

The squirrel people (researchers who studied squirrels) had it easy—when it rained, the squirrels went into their burrows and, so, the squirrel people went into their warm and dry lairs. But bighorn sheep are fighters—rain, snow, or the scorching heat, they’re out there in all weather conditions—and by necessity, so were we. On days like that one though, I liked to imagine that the rams were waiting for us, that they <em>wanted</em> us to find them and collect data about their behavior. I liked to imagine that if we did find them that day, they would miss us stalking their every move.

Besides, I tried to convince ourselves, hiking was keeping us warm and really, what’re a few wet sleeves in the grand scheme of things?

Because, yes, the day was cold, wet, and miserable… But it was also an absolutely amazing time to get to know each other. As we hiked our way through the familiar trees and the dead logs that cold, wet day, my assistant, Camille\*, and I talked. We talked about our beliefs about humanity, our ecological values, educational aspirations, and our short- and long-term goals. We got to know each other. It was a miserable day to be outside—the fact was indisputable—but it was also a beautiful day because we got to understand each other.

And, so, we persevered. We continued our search and our conversation for a couple of more hours. In the end, we didn’t come across any sheep that day, but we did appreciate being able to remove our damp (mostly wet by that time) clothing once we entered the warm trailer. (“What a glorious feeling, I’m happy again.”)

Ah (\*happy sigh\*), life in the field… makes one truly grasp the simple joys of life.

\* Camille has started her own website. Earlier this year, she graduated with a Masters in Biodiversity Conservation and, in December, she will start her PhD in Biodiversity Conservation!

1. Not quite there and back again [getting ‘lost’ (my sense of direction is abysmal) and having to find our way back];

“So… which way are we supposed to go now?” My assistant, Megan (3), asked. I shrugged. Before we started on our way, we were both aware that our sense of direction was horrible.

1. Trails of being an observer [watching a large female grasshopper start eating my field notebook when a male land on top and starts mating with her];

It was only 7am when we started hiking up the hill, but it was a warm morning and we were already sweating. Camille and I chose our spot on the hill based on where we had seen the group of bighorn sheep rams the previous day. We waited as the sun peaked over the hills; we waited as the day got hotter; and we waited as we fretted over having made the wrong call. For three hours, we waited. Both of us bowed our heads over our respective books/Nat Geo magazine as we waited. Finally, at 10am, Camille stood up to stretch her legs and walk around for a bit.

At 10:02am, I finally saw some action. I had stripped off my bright magenta and blue jacket and laid it down in front of me. Camille’s Nat Geo magazine was partially on it. A large female grasshopper flew directly on top of my jacket and stood next to the discarded magazine. I blinked and watched as a smaller male joined her. And before I had the time to smile, the male mounted her and started mating, while she started chewing on the magazine. I blinked again and tried to suppress my laughter – I didn’t want to scare them away… I wanted to watch (what can I say? Ecologists are all about observations). Less than 30 seconds later, however, the female stopped chewing on the magazine and tried to fly off. Tried to. She hobbled off my jacket with the male on top of her and then…. And then, I couldn’t see them anymore – I think they went under my jacket. Anyway, I couldn’t see them.

At the same time, Camille returned, and we saw a few rams making their way down the cliffs, so we got our binoculars out and started identifying the rams. I left the grasshoppers alone… although, once we had identified all the rams, I did check to see if she had laid her eggs on my jacket. Thankfully, my jacket was egg-free.

It still makes me smile. :D And it’s not just because they were mating – I have observed bighorn sheep mating as part of my supervisor’s data collection team, and I’ve watched other beetles’ mate while waiting for sheep. I absolutely loved the fact the female grasshopper was intent on eating anything and everything that she could reach while mating—I still remember my shock at seeing her just tear into the magazine... while mating!

Ah, life in the field—the good old days.

1. coming face to face with a black bear and her three cubs less than 20 ft away when I stood up to check what the thundering sound was;
2. It’s hot and it’s cold [freezing in the cold when we misjudged the weather]
3. trying to decipher our notes with the rain pouring down on us as we tried to collect sheep poo.

“Which way do I go?” I yelled into the walkie-talkie across the field. Megan’s head was bowed under the jacket. I don’t think she heard me – it was pouring, and the sound of the thundering skies drowned out my voice, even with a walkie-talkie.

“Megan?” I tried again, softly this time.

We had left the trailer at 7:30am that morning. The weather forecast had said that there was a 50% probability of rainfall late afternoon/early evening, but we were optimistic that we would find our sheep and collect as much data as we needed before it rained. Over the last few weeks, we had come across different groups of sheep and we were optimistic that it would happen again today.

We were lucky. Sure, we had to drive and hike around the park for four to five hours, but, finally, at around noon, we found our precious! A couple of hours ago, when we had first visited the spot, they hadn’t been there, but who cares, there they were now: 14 gorgeous rams bedded down relatively close to one another. They looked at us as we slowly made our way towards them. Some of the beautiful rams looked at us as if they were just waiting for us to join them… at least that’s how I chose to interpret their actions—in reality, they were trying to make sure that we weren’t predators trying to hunt them. But who cares about reality—we had found them! Today was not going to be a loss! …YaY!

Using my field methodology protocol, Megan 3 and I sat down on the grass about 50 meters away from them. This was close enough that we could track their behavior when we used our binoculars, but also far enough that they weren’t spooked by or presence. We took out all the relevant equipment: folder, pens/pencils, paper to draw a lay association map (figure 1), field notebook to note down the ids of the individuals (more than 90% of resident bighorn sheep have ear tags that we can use to identify them), and, finally, two datasheets—one for each of us.

It was a good day. Despite the thunderstorm warning, it was warm and there wasn’t a cloud in sight. Megan started drawing a rough lay-association map, while I identified the individuals. Usually, my assistants and I follow and record the actions of a few sheep, while I also draw the lay-association map because it is more stressful. That day, however, Megan 3 had mentioned that she wanted to practice the skill, and I love learning and teaching new skills, so I ceded the responsibility to her. Also, who am I to argue when someone makes my life easier by offering to do the more stressful part of the job as well? :D

Anyway, it was a good day… until we saw dark clouds rolling from beyond the mountains. Uh-oh. We were only five hours into our data collection, and I needed at least six! Plus, the clouds still seemed to be quite far away, so we decided to continue. Over the next 30 mins, the clouds continued to come closer. Then, just about 5 and half hours into the data collection for the day, it started to rain. At first, it seemed like it was a light drizzle, so the sheep, Megan (3) and I stayed put. We did quickly take turns to wear our water-proof layers, while continuing to observe the sheep.

Over the next 15 minutes, it started raining harder. We discussed ditching data collection for the day and returning to the cabin. As the person responsible for Megan and my safety, I thought it would be best to ditch data collection for the day. We would, I hoped, find the sheep again tomorrow. But Megan was reluctant. We were so close, she argued, just 15 more mins, then, we could collect the poo, go back to the trailer and be happy about a successful day. It was a tempting offer. I gave in. I agreed with her and it was too bad—both of us were wearing our water-proof gear and it was only 15 mins plus however long it took us to collect the feces.

About fourteen minutes later, the rain started thundering down on us. We had just one more minute, but it was raining hard and the thunder and lightening was getting closer. I decided that our safety was more important—even after the one remaining minute, we would still have to collect feces and I didn’t think we should do it amidst thunder and lightening in the middle of the field.

I told Megan (3) that we should let it be, that we needed to find cover under the trees because the storm was getting closer. She agreed, and we quickly packed our stuff so that it would stay as dry as possible, while we hiked up to the trees. In the middle of packing, I looked at the sheep to note down their last known activity, when I saw that all the sheep were making a run for it. So, for the last minute of our data collection for the day, all the males were running for cover under the trees. I laughed; we had our last minute of data, but we also needed to get cover.

Always follow the animals. Seeing the sheep making a run for it, megan (3) and I also ran, as quickly as we could up the hill, to get to the base of the tree line. We laughed out loud in disbelief—the day had started out so promising and now, we weren’t sure if we would get our samples. We laughed at our foolishness—the things one does in the name of data collection…. How long would we be waiting before being able to make our way back? …and if we are waiting until it stops raining, maybe we could collect the samples that day and turn the good-turned-not-so-good-day into an overall-good-day-after-all.

Our wait was a short one. As quickly as the rain had thundered down on us, it moved away. It petered out to a drizzle. We did wait for an extra five minutes, just to make sure. But it seemed like the storm had passed and we were free to collect fecal samples if we didn’t mind working while it was drizzling.

YaY again! We quickly made our way back to our spot. Megan (3) took out her lay-association map, while I gathered gloves, numbered ziplock bags to collect individual samples and a bag to hold all the filled ziploack bags. I made my way to where the sheep had been laying down. Megan (3) gave directions to individual bedding spots and I went there to gather the feces from the area. It was still drizzling when we collected the tenth sample. But, as Megan (3) was directing me to the 11th spot, it started pouring again! Thankfully, there was no lightening or thunder, but the raindrops were large and heavy. Megan’s lay-association map already damp from the drizzle, despite her attempts to shield it under her hooded head, had no chance. We, somehow, managed to yell at each other to collect the 11th and 12th sample. And it was time to collect the 13th one.

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“Megan?” I tried again.

The only thing I could hear was static from the walkie-talkie. Megan looked up and turned back to the paper. I thought she might be trying to figure out where I was and direct me to the new spot, so I stayed put. Because I hadn’t been able to hear Megan when I was wearing my jacket hood, I had decided not to wear it, so my head was uncovered. Megan looked up and turned back to the paper again. I thought about wiping the water from my eyes and face, but my hands were holding the samples and had been touching feces, so I decided not to. I could feel the rain travelling down my back.

Megan looked up again. “Ummm, Idhi…” She said tentatively. “The paper’s wet and torn, I can’t see where to guide you.”

Right, that explained it. Ok. So, what should we do? Wel

1. The shitty girls episode

Yet again, there we were—high up on the hill, waiting for sheep to descend from the cliffs.

1. Waiting for sheep action [spending the entire day just hiking and getting to know each other]
2. A very long day “It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness”

We started out at 6am – the sun wasn’t out yet. We were excited; after a week of searching for the rams, we had FINALLY come across them at a Ranch the day before. So, today, we could spend the entire day observing their behavior! There was a minor snag in our plans—neither my assistant nor I had a car. So, we would need someone to drive us out there and pick us back up again.

Peter, very kindly and because (I think) he is a true researcher who wants to help others collect data and do good research, offered to drive us there (at 6am) and back again (at 5:30pm). I can hear what you’re thinking ‘wait a second, that’s nearly 12 hours!’ Yep, that’s one of the reasons why it was ‘a very long day’. But, in reality, 12-hour days in the field were pretty common for my research project: first, we needed to observe the sheep for about 6-10 hours (but observing them for longer is better ‘cos you get more data), and then, we also needed to collect their feces after we’d finished our observations. And feces collection could take anywhere from one hour (if they’d all pooed where they’d bedded down) to three hours (when we had to backtrack to several other locations to collect their feces).

Anyway, kind Peter drove Megan (2) and me out to the Ranch at 6am. With a last grateful good-bye wave, we were on our way for our first observations for the week! We were excited—we had our packed lunches, packed snacks and water and plenty of data sheets. YaY! At least, I was very excited—a day just watching sheep, what could, possibly, be better? After about 20 mins of hiking, we saw the sheep exactly where they had been the day before. They were still too far (about 244 meters according to google earth) for us to really settle down and start our observations, but we’d found them—they were right there! We walked closer but, within minutes, while we were still ambling along trying to get closer, they all stood up as if they’d been spooked. We stopped walking. We were too far to see what might have spooked them, but we knew that we were not it. Most of them turned their heads in the opposite direction, and then, as a group, turned towards the treeline and ran away!

We… couldn’t see what the problem was, but the only other time I’ve seen them make a run for it in a similar manner was when this stupid couple came out to the Provincial Park and were walking around with their unleashed dog. Dogs need to be leashed in Parks because they are a risk to the wildlife and the wildlife are a risk to them. But this stupid couple went hiking with their unleashed dog, who then came charging towards the sheep that we had been observing for the past 4 hours! Obviously, the sheep were scared and ran away. It took us a week to find them again. I reiterate, stupid couple. I dislike them very intensely.

Anyway, back to the story – the sheep made a run for it and we were too far to be able to catch up. So, we did the only thing that we thought we could do at the time—we decided to wait. Now, it’s not like we just hunkered down and settled in that spot, no, we decided that we should walk very slowly (so as not to spook them if they saw us again) and continue in the direction that we had been going in the hopes that we wouldn’t be chasing them, but that ultimately we’d come across them again.

So, at this time, it was still pretty early – it wasn’t even 7:00am in the morning!

1. Breaking and Entering… into our own car…

Research and life in the field is so much more than what you imagine it could be when you take biology/ecology courses in school.

Living in the world

1. Balancing eastern and western living
2. Pet-peevs abt hinduisam
3. You’ll hate it! [Switzerland]
4. [I] like it hot [Thailand]

UCalgary badges:

Git stuff:

Type ‘ls’ in the git bash <this should show a list of folders/documents>

Then, type ‘cd Documents’ to set the directory

‘ls’ – to check the folders/documents

‘cd [relevant folder name]’ – in this case it is ‘cd Teachingandlearning’ (also you can hit tab after the ‘teach’ and it will auto-complete

‘ls’ – to check the folders/documents

‘cd webpage’

‘ls’

‘cd test-site’

‘ls -a’ – the ‘-a’ will mean that I can see the hidden folders as well. So I should be able to see the ‘.git/’ folder

‘git status’ – will tell you the overall status: It will show a list of changes that you’ve made to the documents and a list of untracked files. All of these will be in RED ‘cos it has not been committed… and/or is untracked. When I did it the second time with matthew, it showed the msg “no changes added to commit (use “git add” and/or “git commit -a”)

‘git add .’ – adds everything in the folder on to the github site/your section/your (as in my) site

‘git status’ – at this point the branch should be up to date with ‘origin/master’. It will also show a list of changes that were added. Because it’s been added, it will show up in green. HOWEVER, it has NOT been committed yet!

‘git commit -m “imperative statement” – will commit the changes that you[I] just made and the imperative statement will show what the change will do. In this case it was “Make Matthew happy :D”. However, in the future, it should be something that gives me a better clue as to what the change is supposed to do.

‘git status’

‘git remote -v’ – will show you where you need to get the documents to work on and where you’re going to push new material. In this case, it should be the same, and I am ready for the next stage

‘git push’ – wait for a bit. It should show me a list of what it’s doing.

NOW, to get stuff down and work on it: Day 2:

‘git status’

‘git fetch’//’git pull’ – ‘git pull’ is the combination of ‘git fetch’ AND ‘git merge’

‘git status’

‘git merge’

‘bundle exec Jekyll serve’ – need to type this into the git bash to be able to see the website and the changes that I’m making to it, as I’m making ‘em.

TO Add new POSTS and edit stuff: