

Ornithologist: A career for bird enthusiasts

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Tulane student Kyu Min Huh, left, works with faculty members whose research is directly in line with her career goals. One of those faculty members is professor Thomas Sherry, right, co-chair of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. (Photo by Sally Asher)

Even before she began her freshman year at Tulane University in 2015, Kyu Min Huh, an aspiring ornithologist from South Korea, emailed various professors in the [Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology](#) to find out what research opportunities might be available to her.

She learned of three professors who accepted undergraduate research assistants, and before she knew it, she was working in the labs of all three. This past summer, she interned at the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute's Center for Conservation Genomics in Washington D.C., confirming what she already knew.

"It gave me a good look into a scientist's life," Huh said. "I learned that science can be very tedious and sometimes stressful. There are so many things that can go wrong. And in order for me to handle this, I needed to love it, otherwise I could not do this forever."

She loved it.

Huh traces her fascination with birds to the time she spent at boarding school in South Korea. Her history teacher was an avid bird watcher, and she joined him on many an outing to explore the beauty and behavior of birds.

"That collaborating spirit really got me excited about it," she said. "I knew this was an area I wanted to research."

At Tulane, she has studied the fitness, diets and sounds of birds, either through independent study or internship in the labs of professor Thomas Sherry, assistant professor Elizabeth Derryberry and associate professor Jordan Karubian. At the Center for Conservation Genomics, she worked in a genetics lab. This year, in lieu of direct lab work, she is writing a proposal for her future research on take-off behaviors and bird flight.

Sherry, co-chair of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, called Huh "an exceptional student in terms of motivation, skills and mathematical ability. She's highly motivated to pursue a scientific career, and I think she'll go far."