For Immediate Release
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Welch, Matthews & Lewis Receive URSA Travel Support Grants

The Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarly Activity (URSA) has awarded Travel Support Grants in the amount of $300 each to Katelyn Welch, Jason Matthews and Robert Lewis. Travel Support Grants are intended to support undergraduate students accepted to present research at a professional conference or gathering. A portion of this grant is intended to fund poster printing/lamination expenses.

Welch is senior wildlife biology major in the Jesse D. Jones College of Science, Engineering and Technology. Her presentation is entitled, "Examining the Risk and Rewards for the Anthropogenic Spread of Wild Hogs." Her project focuses on the illegal importation and release of wild hogs throughout the United States, specifically the enforcement of such laws and the penalties associated with their violation. Findings from her research suggest that in order to reduce the likelihood of the anthropogenic spread of wild hogs, federal agencies should focus on increasing the monetary fines of this illegal activity, or increase the emphasis that engaging in such prohibited acts will ultimately result in prosecution. Welch is a native of Benton, Kentucky.

Matthews is a sophomore wildlife biology major in the Jesse D. Jones College of Science, Engineering and Technology. His presentation is entitled, "Distinguishing between Eurasian Wild boar Hybrids and Feral Swine Using Molecular Analyses." The project involves utilizing both morphological and genetic methods in order to first identify wild hogs, and then applying those methods to determine their accuracy and precision. His findings should benefit law enforcement officials by providing a more objective method to accurately identify and prosecute those individuals involved in the anthropogenic spread of wild hogs. Matthews is a native of Louisville, Kentucky.

Lewis is a senior wildlife and conservation biology major in the Jesse D. Jones College of Science, Engineering and Technology. His presentation is entitled, "The Consumption of Metallic Lead and its Effects on Tissue Lead Levels of Urban and Rural Eastern Gray Squirrels." The project concerns the consumption of metallic lead in squirrels. Specifically, if squirrels are ingesting the lead unknowingly while foraging, if they intentionally gnaw and ingest the lead, or if they gnaw, but do not ingest the lead. If the lead is indeed ingested, his research also seeks to discover whether the lead is metabolized, or if it is not metabolized and is simply passed through the digestive system. Lewis is a native of Great Mills, Maryland.

Welch, Matthews & Lewis plan to present their findings in Pittsburgh, PA at the National Wildlife Society Conference. The conference will be held from October 27-29, 2014.

Joe N. Caudell, assistant professor in the Jesse D. Jones College of Science, Engineering and Technology, served as faculty mentor for all three projects.

More information about the URSA program can be found online at http://campus.murraystate.edu/services/ursa/ or by calling (270) 809-3192.