



Photo: Kim Stewart

Sunset at Booth Canal, Salt Spring Island.

Interning at the Galiano Conservancy - Frieda Weinert

On a sunny morning in March, a ferry took me to one of the southern Gulf Islands. Just a few months before, I was in Germany and had to decide where I would go abroad to volunteer. As a forest engineering student at the University of Applied Sciences Weihenstephan-Triesdorf, this was a requirement of my program. I was stuck between choosing Slovenia or British Columbia. Both beautiful, but different.

In the end I chose Galiano, because of the west coast. Mountains, sea, and forests everywhere. I read online and I had a talk via phone with Keith Erickson, ecologist at the Galiano Conservancy Association (GCA), about projects I could be a part of. The final decision was made.

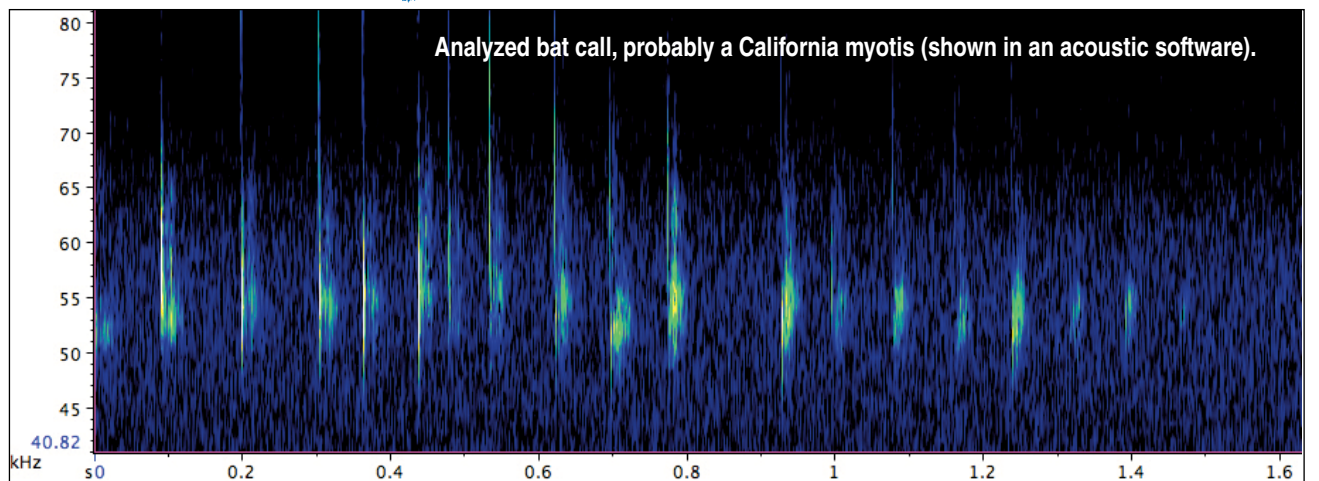
Over the last six months I have volunteered at the GCA. It is a democratic grassroots organization that has grown over the last near-27 years, during times of climate change and habitat conversion, into a very knowledgeable and socially minded non-profit. The purposes of the GCA are to protect and enhance the quality of the human and natural environment of the area. Being a land trust, it also works to support the establishment of wilderness and other natural habitat preserves for the benefit of many generations to come.

The first experience I had was seeing natural areas less controlled by man. It was fabulous to recognize the natural structure of trees (the German forest economy loves straight timber) and the species richness of plants and animals on the island.

Soon I was involved in a stream survey at the recently restored Learning Centre cove, and other restoration projects on different nature habitats. Because of long term use and invasion of exotic species we wanted to recreate a natural creek ecosystem for different native plants and wildlife species. With the mentoring of Keith, it was possible to experience the work as an ecologist. Having these unique, hands-on experiences is why my university program wants all the students to get out and work with organizations in Germany or other countries.

Cedana Bourne, the agriculture and nursery coordinator of the GCA, shared her knowledge about herbs while working in the nursery and the greenhouse. I helped also at the Permaculture 'Food Forest', a sustainable garden where the forest is used as a canopy and protector for growing edible plants.

Education programs at the food forest and other places



around Galiano and the Learning Centre were very helpful to practice English and a lot of fun too. My favourite moment at a program was disguising myself as the 'Fairy Godmother' of the pond and enchanting the kids with stories of the pond creatures and why I need their help to look after the frogs, bats and dragonflies.

The GCA staff members had confidence and trust in me and my work, so I was able to finish some projects on my own. One of these was a bat monitoring project at the Galiano Learning Centre. This work is new for Galiano and we were very excited to start monitoring to see which species of bats live here. I volunteered at the Salt Spring Conservancy with Peter Ommundsen to learn about their established program. Peter shared his skills and knowledge about monitoring bats in BC with me and the GCA.

But to monitor wildlife, we needed to have an acoustic detector. It was the first time I realized that I am working with a non-profit and I have to search for a way to make this monitoring possible. Fortunately, Keith had a contact named Paul Grant, wildlife biologist at Grant Scientific Services Ltd. He was very generous and loaned us a detector and gave us a lot of support while analyzing bat calls. It is hard to tell the calls apart at first!

It was a pleasure for me to work with Peter and Paul. We analyzed four different species over 19 days of recordings.

Little brown bat, big brown bat, California myotis and long-eared myotis. It fascinated me how many different bat voices I listened to.

The skills I learned in the past six months will help me in my future as a forester and maybe some day as an ecologist, but more importantly, as a human to understand the earth as a whole.

But honestly, I wasn't working 24/7. I went with friends to remote places on Vancouver Island, where we saw coastal wolves and a bear. I was lucky to circumnavigate Saturna Island by kayak and see the shorelines and ecosystems of some magnificent areas and the peace and quiet of reserves. Living in a wonderful house and spending time with new friends made Galiano my favourite place on earth. Thanks to everyone.

What's next? I am back at school now, having some field trips to Slovenia, south Bavaria and graduating in summer 2017. I hope very much to come back in spring 2017 to Galiano to finish my bachelor's thesis working with the GCA and doing further bat monitoring under the mentorship of Keith and Paul. Hope to see you next year! 🐉

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