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August 19, 2009
SS 09.11D

Jack Hildick-Smith (Sleepy Hollow, N.Y.)

Caring for animals, scuba diving and swimming are among his favorite activities, but Jack Hildick-Smith of Sleepy Hollow, N. Y. also likes biology and ceramics. He is a docent at the New York Aquarium on Coney Island and cares for four fish tanks at home.

This summer he got to put some of his interests and experience to work as an intern at the Woods Hole Science Aquarium, the nation's oldest public research display aquarium and part of NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center in Woods Hole, Mass.

The annual internships provide students with the opportunity to work with a professional staff caring for a collection of about 140 species of fish and invertebrates common to the continental shelf from Maine to North Carolina, two harbor seals named LuSeal and Bumper, and sometimes sea turtles held for rehabilitation and eventual release. The interns learn about marine animal husbandry, aquarium operations, conservation, and public education. They are also trained to serve as assistant naturalists on public collecting walks to local harbors and estuaries.

Hildick-Smith began his summer internship at the Aquarium July 6 and also participated in the Aquarium's Careers in Marine Science Seminar July 27 to August 7. The seminar students get training in marine animal husbandry and basic aquarist chores, hear presentations from scientists working in a variety of marine fields, go on collecting trips, visit other Woods Hole science institutions, and go on field trips to the New Bedford waterfront, Whaling Museum and Buttonwood Park Zoo and Nantucket's Maria Mitchell Association Aquarium.

The career seminar is designed to give students an idea of what people working in Woods Hole do, and how different areas of science contribute to the larger effort to understand the marine world and to manage marine resources wisely.

“I was interested in pursuing a career in marine science or the medical field before I got to Woods Hole, but after this experience I am thinking more about animal husbandry or animal training,” he said of his summer experience.

A junior at Horace Mann School in the Bronx, Hildick-Smith manages and cares for the school’s aquarium collections with a classmate. He gained permission and funding for a new saltwater tank for the study of cephalopods, a class of animals that includes squids and octopods, which he will be working on the next two years. He has been fascinated by cephalopods since the third grade, when he did a voluntary independent study project on the animals.

Hildick-Smith was an intern at the Hudson River Museum last year, managing the museum’s fresh and salt water exhibits and caring for sick fish. He restored the seashore exhibit, and collected Hudson River estuary fish for exhibit.

“I have been interested in cuttlefish for a long time and raised some squid this summer in the Science Aquarium’s tanks,” he said. “I am really interested in how cephalopods interact with humans.”

For Jack Hildick-Smith, the opportunity to learn more about caring for marine animals from experts and fellow students was something he wanted to do once he heard about the Woods Hole Science Aquarium’s high school internship program from a former intern.

“The internship allowed me to use all my scientific, aquarium, learning and people skills and to be responsible for the care of more animals across a much wider range of species and environments,” he said. “I got to attend lectures and visit other research facilities in Woods Hole, one of the world centers for marine science. But the best part was meeting researchers who are doing what I am interested in.”

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Related links:

Woods Hole Science Aquarium: <http://aquarium.nefsc.noaa.gov/>

Aquarium Blog: <http://whaquarium.wordpress.com/>