**What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?**

I think this organization is absolutely amazing. It has really taught me about the major threats elephant’s face and conservation status of elephants in Thailand. For example, I did not know that in Thailand, elephants are considered livestock so they do not get any protection. The wildlife management in Thailand is so different from what I know in the United States, but I hope I can one day use my own intelligence and experiences in conservation management to work with people like Lek in increasing awareness on the issues wildlife face.

When I first arrived to Thailand, I actually had two days off from work. So I spent this time walking around the city to visit temples. On Monday, I spent a week at the Elephant Nature Park where I got to join about 50 other volunteers. My experience at the park has been one of the greatest moments I’ve experienced in my life. I got to meet people from all around the globe who share the same passion as I do. We also got to learn first-hand the hard work it takes to care for over 30 elephants. Our jobs were different everyday and it ranged from cutting corn, to washing and preparing food, to cleaning elephant poop, and walking around the park and meeting elephants. At the end of my week at the park, one of the elephants gave birth to a baby girl named Dok Mai. Watching all the elephants reacting to her pregnancy was fantastic. When they were released in the morning, many of them ran to the cage to see the new baby girl. I didn’t think I would ever get the chance to see a day old baby elephant.

On my second week I did another of the programs offered with this organization. This program is called Journey to Freedom and it takes place about 8 hours from Chiang Mai in a remote village on top of a hill. In this area there was no electricity and no more western style toilets. Going without electricity isn’t too bad, and usually the squat toilets weren’t too bad. It wasn’t until nighttime that going to the bathroom became a nightmare. I didn’t have a flashlight with me so I only had a flashlight app on my Iphone. I only had a limited amount of light, but I made sure to check every corner and crack for any bugs and spiders. Since it was the hot season, we didn’t have much to do around the village. We did get to meet several wild, but not completely, elephants that belong to some people in the village. What I mean by not being completely wild is that Lek pays these villagers to remain wild. If she wasn’t paying them, these elephants would be put to work in the streets of cities. I think Journey to Freedom is a wonderful program that is really educating these villagers on how to properly care for their animals. The next group of volunteers will be taking lots of medicine to treat several of the dogs and cats around the villages!

I am really enjoying my time with this organization. I am really gaining a new perspective on the problems in wildlife management faced in the world. I would love to continue my education back home and do research in conservation genetics or population dynamics to help bring awareness to elephant conservation.

**What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?**

When I arrived in Chiang Mai it was around 10 pm. So I didn’t really get to see anything new other than the fact that in Thailand you drive on the other side of the street. But I was already expecting that. The following day I woke up at around 6 am and decided that I should look for the ENP office. I was told that it was a very short walk and I won’t have any trouble finding it. Well, they were greatly mistaken. I got extremely lost and walked for more than 2 hours trying to find the office. What stood out to me the most while walking around the city was the craziness of the traffic. It’s like lanes don’t exist here and it’s a “every man for himself” mentality. The taxis are pretty crazy as well. Every few minutes I’d get another taxi honking at me to get my attention. I quickly learned that if you don’t even acknowledge them, they will leave you alone.

**What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?**

My greatest fear prior to departing didn’t really have anything to do with Thailand, but with myself. I am an incredibly shy person and usually don’t have any confidence in myself. One of my biggest fears was that I would have trouble making friends and I would have a miserable time because of it. When I was greeted at the airport in Chiang Mai, that fear completely disappeared when I realized how welcoming everyone was. Even at the park, I felt extremely comfortable talking to everyone. It helps that I am meeting people from different parts of the world. I am constantly learning new things whether its words in a different language or differences in cultures. Another thing I feared was the heat. I am originally from Texas, but I hated the heat so I moved to Alaska. I have always preferred cold weather so I wasn’t sure how my body would react to such an extreme temperature again. Well the truth is I am still trying to adjust. During the hottest times of the day, I will hide inside because I am not particularly fond of being sweaty. During the night I find it extremely difficult to sleep. But once I am asleep, it gets a lot cooler. I’m sure eventually I will be fine outside in the hot Thailand sun.

**1.  How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit?  How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself?  What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?**

 After completely my volunteer week at the Elephant Nature Park and at Journey to Freedom, I spent about 2 weeks at the office before coming to Cambodia. My first week at the office wasn’t actually doing work. Monday and Tuesday were holidays from the Thai New Year, so I got to enjoy Songkran around Chiang Mai. On Thursday and Friday, I attended a funeral for one of the employees that worked with Save Elephant Foundation. This week didn’t really give me a feel of what I was going to do in the office. My second week was quite unorganized. I conducted a few interviews to make sure a future employee has good English, I checked e-mails and printed reservations, and I mostly found myself asking Patty if there was anything I could do. The truth is, I don’t really think there needs to be 2 interns at the office. Shelby was keeping herself occupied with feedback forms and there wasn’t anything for me to do. This is when I decided I should ask Lek instead of Patty if there was anything for me to do. And I got to say, I got some quick results because I ended up coming to Cambodia the very next day. I think talking to Lek really helped me out because I have always been quite scared of talking to my employers, even back home. But the thing is, they are always going to find a way to help you out as long as they know you are willing to do more. For the next half of my internship I hope to complete all 4 of Lek’s projects. The last one I need to do is the Surin project. I really enjoying comparing and contrasting these projects and learning more about the struggles of conservation in developing countries.

**2.  How are things going relative to your personal goals?  In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand?  What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?**

My three personal goals were to 1) gain confidence in myself, 2) gain a new perspective in life, and 3) learn more about myself. By learning more about myself, I was able to realize what I need to work on to become more confident in myself. I am still as timid and reserved as I was before I came to this internship. I am still trying to acclimate to my new work environment, especially after working in a laboratory for 2 years and only working with another person. I would love to become more comfortable working with so many people.

**3.  How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals?  What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far?  What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?**

My cross-cultural goals were to 1) learn the risks of making assumptions on first impressions, 2) learn the proper way of communicating with someone from a different culture to avoid offending another, and 3) appreciating a different lifestyle from my own. So far I haven’t really made any kind of assumptions. Most people I have met thus far have always left such a friendly impression, at least in regards to Thai people. In terms of communicating, most people will understand what you are saying, but in those rare occasions you will probably have to either play a game of charades or give up. There were a few occasions where I would try to have a conversation with one of the Mahouts in Cambodia. My questions were kept pretty simple like “Who’s your favorite dog?” and although he sometimes had a trouble understanding what I was asking, he would eventually figure it out. I think for the 3 months I was here, I got many different cultural experiences. I couldn’t think of anything else I might be missing.

**Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?**

My work schedule is from 9 am to 5 pm Monday to Friday. At around noon, I take a lunch break at Juicy4u which is one of the 2 options you will have for lunch. After work, I will usually have dinner and then go back to my hotel room. Since I don’t actually drink, I don’t bother going to any of the bars around Chiang Mai. Sometime I will go to one of the markets around town, but I don’t like being tempted to buy something.

**Housing:  What is your living situation like?  Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead?  If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.**

I am living in an apartment complex .37 km from the office. My living situation is not what I expected it would be. I was originally on the 4th floor and found out that you do not get internet on that floor. After spending most days at the office just to use internet, I ended up asking Patty if I can switch to a lower floor. I am now living on the 2nd floor which is nicer since there are no elevators. I found it really difficult to sleep in my room because, despite having a fan, I was too hot. I just can’t sleep when I’m sweating. There is also no light in my bathroom so I usually have to use it with the door open. The people who work at the hotel don’t have very good English so you can’t really expect them to help you out. The bathrooms do have western style toilets, but make sure to buy your own toilet paper and keep a trash bag in your room. There is no laundry service in the apartment building, but you can find some nearby. Depending on my budget, I would have told Patty that I would rather pay for my own apartment because sometimes comfort can be really important.

**Finances:  How is your budget working out for you?  Are you spending more or less that what you expected?  How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc?  What would you do differently knowing what you know now?**

I am trying to spend as little as possible during my internship. For the most part, I have spent very little in Thailand, especially since I do not have to pay for my apartment room or for lunch meals. However, Cambodia seems to be the opposite. Since Cambodia uses the USD it seems that everything is so much more expensive. Unfortunately, I only got a single entry visa so I had to go to Phnom Penh for a few days to get a new Thai visa. I would have liked to get it as soon as possible, but due to it being the King’s birthday, I had to wait a few additional days before I could actually apply for a new visa. Not only that, but it takes 3 business days or so before I even get my passport. Since I turned in my passport on Thursday, I had to wait until Tuesday to get it back, which means I had to spend even more money on a hotel, more money on food, and more money on transportation. I eventually didn’t even leave my room because I did not want to spend any money at all. I would have definitely applied for a multi-entry visa instead of a single based on what I know now.

**Travel and Transportation:  How do you typically get around town and to work?  Are you satisfied with that choice?  Would you recommend other options?  Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off?  How do you manage that?  What do you recommend for travel options?  Where do you recommend exploring?**

Since the office is only .37km I usually just walk to work. I find myself walking to most places I end up going since the office is located in the old city which makes it easy to find markets and places to eat. If you plan on going to a farther location, you can use a tuk tuk or a songtau. Make sure you bargain because they will charge you quite a bit if you look anything like a westerner. Getting a bike is also another option. I have not had the opportunity to do that in Thailand, but I did get a bike for Cambodia. I rode a bike to visit many of the Angkor temples in Siem Reap. If you are working in the office in Thailand you will have plenty of time to explore the surrounding area since you get off work at around 5 pm. However, if you are working in Cambodia you will most likely be at the park since the office is still not running. The good thing is that they make weekly weekend trips to Siem Reap so you will have a chance to explore the area. You can also visit the temples and get a tuk tuk ride back to the park.

**Professional:  How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship?  What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?**

It’s difficult to say how my coursework prepared me for this internship. You aren’t exactly taught the wildlife management practices from other countries and are mostly taught the history of wildlife management in the United States. I did learn about the anatomy and the skeletal characteristics of elephants in one of my classes, but I don’t think it was that important to know. I have been able to compare and contrast conservation between these two countries and have tried to think about what could be done to create better management plans in Thailand. Education is important for conservation, but unfortunately environmental science isn’t seen as a priority in schools. If westerners learned more about the importance of biodiversity and conserving keystone species, then we would see a bigger decline in animals used for tourism. One of my goals has always been to go back to my hometown of Laredo and integrate environmental studies into the curriculum. I would love to see more people interested in wildlife conservation.

**Cross Cultural:  Describe an event where you misunderstood something due to cultural differences.  What did you do?  What would you do next time?**

I can’t really think of an instance where I misunderstood something. The only thing that comes to mind is the language barrier and sometimes I cannot understand what they are saying even though they are speaking English. This is also due to the fact that I am sometimes hard of hearing; so I have a hard time understanding anyone (even native English speakers).

**Personal:  What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience?**

One of the most important things that I have learned about myself is how much I want to continue learning about wildlife conservation and management in developing countries. I’ve always loved and been interested in wildlife conservation, but this internship just increased my passion tenfold. Although I do miss science and I miss doing research. I would love to continue working with non-profit organizations, but I would rather do the research that helps raise awareness on issues than working directly with people. Scientific research is definitely my calling.

Another thing that I have learned is the importance of traveling. Most of the people I have met have traveled to multiple countries. They will usually sit in a circle and start discussing all the countries they’ve been to or are planning on going to. When they ask me how many countries I’ve been to, it always feel awkward saying that this is my first time outside of North America. Traveling had never been an option before since I don’t exactly come from a wealthy family. But I’m hoping I can do more traveling through grad school.

**Knowing what you know now, what advice do you have for any future interns?  Provide some perspective relative to the three aspects of your internship:  personal, professional and cross-cultural.  Where were the challenges and where were the highlights?  What advice can you give to assist future interns in maximizing their efforts to achieve their personal, professional and cross-cultural goals?**

Since this was my first time out of the country, I over packed quite a bit. I brought way more than I should have and it really limited the amount of traveling I could do. If I could start all over I would have just brought a backpack with a few articles of clothing. You can definitely find most things here for a fairly cheap price. Another thing is to not be afraid to speak up, especially to Lek. I was always so nervous talking to her, but every time I did she was extremely inviting and friendly. If I never asked her if she had something for me to do, I would have never had the chance to go to Cambodia. Make sure you go to this internship with clear goals and plan on talking to someone about those goals and what you hope to achieve with this organization.