

ABBEY WARD - afward@illinois.edu

Abbey joined INHS on January 19 as a Visiting Scientific Specialist, Field Scientist. She grew up and currently live in the Peoria, IL area. Abbey graduated from Augustana College May of 2020 with a degree in Biology and Environmental Studies and a minor in Geography. Her undergrad research focused on the impact of riparian zones on watershed health.

Last summer, she was a Crew Lead on a wetland restoration project at Indiana Dunes National Park. Her crew removed invasive species from wetland habitats and planted native flora. Abbey also worked at Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory where she conducted research on local turtle populations, monitored plant species, and surveyed butterfly species. She also led volunteer workdays and collected and processed native seeds.



Her experience working with Mighty Earth and Green America on environmental campaigns exposed her to different agricultural practices. Her passion for restoration stemmed from my research internship at Nahant Marsh along the Mississippi River.

Outside of work, Abbey enjoy rock climbing, camping throughout the Midwest with her family, and taking her dogs on long walks.

CHRIS MILLER – cmm17@illinois.edu

Chris Miller works as a Field Scientist at the Illinois Natural History Survey. Focused on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), he monitors conservation easements in Central Illinois and provides educational outreach and advice to landowners regarding the Program. He was born and raised in Fort Worth, Texas, where his relationship with the environment began. Growing up in the Scouts, he spent countless hours outdoors, forming a deep connection with nature and wildlife that drove him to pursue a career in conservation.

He earned his BSc in Zoology from the University of St Andrews, located on the east coast of Scotland. While in University, he focused primarily on ecological interactions and conservation, and his undergraduate thesis examined the skeletal morphometrics of an isolated population of Soay sheep living in the St Kilda archipelago.



After graduation, Chris returned to Texas, where his career led him to Fossil Rim Wildlife Center, a non-profit entity that cares for over 1,000 animals on its property. He started as an animal care specialist at the Children’s Animal Center before moving to the education department to serve as a Conservation Educator. During his time at Fossil Rim he cared for the facility’s ambassador animals, gave driving tours, gave educational talks, and performed outreach in the local community. This position sparked Chris’s continued passion for solving problems of science communication and helping to foster deeper connections between humans and their environment. He became a Certified Interpretive Guide and after a brief period as an axe throwing instructor, he joined INHS as a Stream Research Technician in the summer of 2020. He has been based in Champaign ever since.

Outside of work, you can usually find Chris on a hiking trail or trying to invent a new cocktail. He is a lover of world languages, history, fantasy literature, and tabletop gaming. He enjoys listening to music and playing it when he can.

KRISHNA TIWARI - katiwari@illinois.edu

Krishna joined INHS on October 16 as a Scientific Specialist/Field Scientist. Krishna monitors conservation easements through the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), as well as provides information to landowners looking to enroll in the program. He was born and raised in Wilkesboro, North Carolina and developed a love for the environment, nature, and wildlife. Krishna attended Western Carolina University where he majored in Environmental Science and minored in Anthropology. A year after graduating from Western Carolina University, Krishna attended the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) and completed a dual master's program in Environmental Science and Public Administration. At UNCW, Krishna focused on wildlife management and environmental policy.



Krishna has worked for a variety of environmental and natural resource organizations. After graduating from Western Carolina University, he worked for the NASA DEVELOP National



Program and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) Natural Resources Department, where he conducted wildlife surveys for eastern hellbenders, elk, freshwater mussels, as well as native fish/salamander species. He also has experience working at the Bald Head Island Conservancy as a Sea Turtle Intern tasked with monitoring and tagging female loggerhead sea turtles to monitor nesting activities, established nests, and hatchlings during hatching season. Krishna also has a background in working with web maps and geodatabases while tracking species such as the Diamond Back Terrapin and Northern Goshawks.

Outside of work, you can find Krishna playing tennis, soccer, basketball, and other sports. He also likes to go birding and look for reptiles and amphibians. Krishna also enjoys tabletop games like Catan and engages in other fantasy games whenever he can.

MOLLY KOLECZEK - mollyak@illinois.edu

Molly grew up in the south Chicago suburbs enjoying spending time outside in all four seasons whether it be summer sports and swimming or playing in the snow and sledding. She always knew she wanted to work with animals and was able to do that in various capacities after completing her BSc. in zoology from Olivet Nazarene University. Her capstone project looked for patterns in melanistic versus gray squirrel populations across Indiana and Illinois.



She spent time on the east coast in Florida and Virginia, supporting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration in the marine mammal and sea turtle stranding response networks. She then moved into a career in conservation education at several AZA accredited zoos in Illinois and Arizona, developing curriculum for youth programs and community outreach focused on fostering connections to the outdoors and building empathy for wildlife.



Molly decided to pursue a postgraduate degree to further her knowledge of in situ conservation best practices and completed her MSc. in 2023 in biodiversity and conservation from Trinity College Dublin. Her final research project investigated wind farm impacts on invertebrate populations.

Molly joined the INHS in October 2023 as a Field Scientist. She is excited to be back in the Midwest using her love of the outdoors as well as putting her practical skills to work, while forming connections to landowners for the support of conservation.

PETER SCHMIDT - pfs@illinois.edu

Peter joined the Illinois Natural History Survey as a Field Scientist on October 16, 2023. As a person on the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), he monitors conservation easements in West Central Illinois and provides information and advice to landowners regarding the program. He grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, where he obtained his bachelor's in biology from Bethel University in May of 2022. His undergraduate research focused on bird diversity and density during migration in riparian and lakeside habitats.



For two years, Peter was the Head Naturalist at Trout Lake Camps in northern Minnesota. Here, he created programs to help teach around 2,000 young children about the natural world. These included programs about native rocks, trees, insects, grasses, and birds. This type of science education sparked him to find his place in the world of science. After a brief stint at a Minnesota biotech company, he's thrilled to be back in the world of ecology and biology education.



Outside of work, you can find him outside, hiking new trails, and finding cool birds and reptiles. He can also be found inside, playing board games, and reading fantasy novels.

TREVOR O'BRIEN - tmobrien@illinois.edu

Trevor O'Brien joined INHS on October 16th. He completed his bachelor's at Iowa State University Majoring in Animal Ecology, with an option in wildlife. While obtaining his bachelors, he worked as a lab assistant organizing the mammalogy collection and interned as a zookeeper.

As a zookeeper, he worked with animals ranging from gray wolves to zebras and lemurs. He was also vice president of Iowa States Fish and Wildlife Club, where he participated in student outreach events and activities.



He participated in a field class in Montana and Glacier National Park conducting mountain goat surveys, small mammal trapping, and organizing a research project on Pikas.



After graduating, he spent one year as a biological technician for Western Ecosystems technology conducting mortality surveys for birds and bats on operational wind farms, as well as assisting in bias trails and carcass persistency trials. In his free time, Trevor enjoys going on long hikes, fishing, or curling up on the couch and reading a book.