Ashley's Major: Biology and Spanish

Program: UW Ceiba Rainforest Ecology Field Expedition, Winter

Academic Life: Since the program was through my FIG (led by UW professor Catherine Woodward), my classmates included the peers who shared the same classes as myself during our first semester at UW. We conducted our own research projects while in the Amazon, and mine involved observing the activity budgets of common wooly monkeys (Lagothrix Lagotricha). We conducted thorough research on the monkeys during our first semester at UW-Madison, and then conducted on-site research by following and observing them for three days at the Tiputini Biodiversity Station in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest. We also wrote an official scientific research report and presented our projects to our peers and some of the researchers conducting experiments at Tiputini.

Most Memorable Experience: I had the opportunity to join Dr. John Blake, a wildlife ecology and conservation researcher, while he was conducting an experiment on the translocation movements of birds in the understory. We walked for 45 minutes off trail at 5 a.m. into the heart of the Amazon to set up bird traps. In one of the traps, a male and female toucanette had flown into the net by accident, and I was able to view its vibrant colors up close. I had only ever viewed this bird through my binoculars from a distance, so seeing this amazing bird up close was surreal.

Location: Ecuador is absolutely astonishing and is not comparable to any other place in the world. The landscape is so vast and different that it is hard to imagine the country is about the size of the state of Colorado. Whether it was shivering in the high elevations of the paramo, to dripping in sweat in the heart of the Amazon Rainforest, to strolling down the vibrant streets of Quito (the capital), there will never be enough time to explore and indulge in everything the beautiful country has to offer.

“I now am no longer as scared towards the unknown, because I’ve realized it is all part of the adventure.”