**ECUADOR**

**LUCAS RAPISARDA**

**Lucas’s Majors:** Wildlife Ecology, Community and Environmental Sociology

**Program:** Ceiba Tropical Ecosystems: Andes, Amazon, Pacific Coast, Summer

**Academic Life:** The classroom experience on my program was very hands on. We usually spent the mornings in the field, conducting experiments and hiking around whichever habitat type was for that day. The afternoons were devoted primarily to lectures, where we learned about ecosystem dynamics as well as larger issues affecting ecosystems. The classroom setting was very relaxed. Our class was made up of students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the University of Minnesota, and one international student who was from France.

**Most Memorable Moments:** My most memorable experience from the program was definitely our day in the canopy tower. We were in Tiputini Biodiversity Reserve, and had climbed to a platform that was situated around 140ft. in the air. For miles around you could see endless, pristine Tropical Rainforest. Not only was the scenery beautiful, but we were also able to observe a myriad of different bird species, monkeys, and insects. At one point a king vulture, second only in size to the Andean Condor, landed approximately 20ft. from us, and perched, which is extremely rare to see. Overall, it was a truly amazing experience!

**How Study Abroad Changed Lucas:** My study abroad experience has changed me in many ways: I have discovered more about who I am as a person, and what my job plans are after graduation. It has taught me even more to appreciate the amazing biodiversity that can be found on this planet, while at the same time crystallizing the harsh realities that protectors of biodiversity face. Also, my study abroad experience has given me a taste of field work, and has greatly influenced my plans for after graduation.

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"If you are at all interested in wildlife, the outdoors, or adventure, do this program!"

Lucas in front of a large waterfall in the El Pahuma Cloud Forest Orchid Preserve.