

Miami U. programs helps bring real-life science into classroom

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SPRINGBORO — Project Dragonfly and Earth Expeditions are linking real-life science to the classroom.

A veteran of Miami University's global conservation collaborative and education program with the Cincinnati Zoo, Joyce Cook traveled to Belize last year.

This summer as part of the first Project Dragonfly Global Field Program, she'll journey to Trinidad in the southern Caribbean to work with scientists studying the re-introduction of the blue-and-gold macaw to the wild.

She also will tag sea turtles and work with local teachers and students.

The Springboro High School math teacher said her experience has had a profound effect on her.

"This experience enhances your global perspective and shows you the differences that you can make in the community as well as in the school setting," Cook said. "It has really helped me change as a person and made me conscious of everyday activities."

John Fiely also is making his second foray with the group. He traveled to Belize in 2005 to conduct research and promote conservation. He said the program is the perfect springboard for introducing students to the idea that learning should be based around students' questions.

"This experience creates a whole new perspective — it's a real eye-opener," said the teacher of eighth-grade science at Winton Woods Middle School. "A lot of the methods in a traditional classroom are ineffective. Like when you keep doing something over again. You need to crank up the courage to do something different in order to overcome the problems that are inherent in classrooms these days."

Fiely will go to the landlocked Asian nation of Mongolia to study steppe ecology and the conservation of Pallas' cats and Przewalski's horses. His group will join some of Mongolia's top radio programmers, local youth reporters and Mongolian educators for a Conservation Radio Workshop sharing international stories and creating conservation messages.

The entire experience will flow into his inquiry-teaching method, which "allows for the students to become more engaged in the curriculum."

Cook echoed Fiely's sentiment.

"Students naturally ask questions. And what we bring back to the classroom will help them on their journeys to find the answers to those questions," she said.

Laura McCalmont and Rachel McChesney, teachers in the Mason City Schools district, are going to the Central American country of Belize to monitor manatee population dynamics, human influence on coral reefs and to sample aquatic mangrove species.

McCalmont, who has never before set foot outside the continental U.S., is thrilled, both for herself and for her students.

"This will give the kids a different perspective where they'll be able to make real-world connections," she said. "I'll be able to bring something real back to the kids and help make science come alive for them."