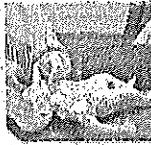


Teacher selected

Doane Stuart science teacher Katherine Miller is one of 150 American and international educators selected for the inaugural year of a global master's degree that includes travel this summer to study in Mongolia, from June 14-23.

Infant CPR program

A free program on infant CPR will be offered 6-8:30 p.m.



June 25 at Samaritan Hospital in Troy. Presenter is Don Miller, American

Heart Association certified instructor. 271-3393.

Parkinson's support

The Schenectady Parkinson's Support Group meets 2-3:30 p.m. June 24 in the activity room of Baptist Health Nursing Center, Scotia. Nikki Dress from Eddy Senior Care will talk about respite and home care. 243-4246.

MOVIES	OBITUARIES	COMICS
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EDUCATION

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ALBANY

Very long-distance learning

Teacher studies wild horses, cats in Mongolia

BY MICHAEL GOOT
Gazette Reporter

Mongolia may not exactly be a summer vacation destination, but Doane Stuart School science teacher Katherine Miller made a return visit this summer to observe wild horses and cats.

Miller was part of a group of scientists in the Global Field Program that spent five weeks in June and July studying two exotic species native to Mongolia, the Przewalski horse and the pallas cat. The first-year program is run by Miami University of Ohio in partnership with the Cincinnati Zoo and Earth Expeditions and allows teachers to earn a master's degree by doing field work.

Miller said she was at a conference for science teachers when she heard someone talking about a trip to Mongolia. In 2005, she went with her friend to the central Asian country located between Russian and China, and she wanted to return.

Miller was one of about 20 students who spent 12 days living in field camps to study the habitat in the wild. They slept on the ground in very primitive tent-like shelters known as gers.

"There were no showers or anything like that," she said.

Miller described the environment as desert steppe, which is a dry grassland climate.

The Przewalski horse looks similar to horses in this country except that their manes are very short and stand erect and they have a stripe running from their mane to the tail, according to Miller. They sort of resemble zebras and have a prominent role in



Above, Katherine Miller, a science teacher at Doane Stuart School, works with a radio telemetry device that tracks wild pallas cats, like the one at left, fitted with radio collars in Mongolia.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF
KATHERINE MILLER

Mongolian culture. They are in a lot of the traditional stories of Genghis Khan, whose men were said to ride on them.

"They're extraordinarily sturdy, strong beasts. They can't be domesticated," she said.

However, their numbers are dwindling because they have been hunted.

This species of horse actually went extinct in the wild. However, scientists were able to do a captive breeding program; they released 80 horses back into the wild, and now the population has grown to more than 200.

"It's pretty amazing to stand and look at some horses and know you're seeing 20 percent of the existing wild population of a species," she said.

Pallas cats resemble house cats but are more ferocious.

"You think, 'Oh, my God. It's so cute.' [But] it's a totally wild ani-

mal — vicious. It's nothing you would want in your living room," she said.

The cats hunt small rodents, which compete with the grazing animals for grasses and seeds. However, if local farmers try to poison the rodents, sometimes the cats get hurt as well.

In a highlights of the trip, one of the researchers caught a pallas cat with his bare hands.

Collars that emit a radio signal have been placed on some of the wild cats so researchers can track them.

The people of Mongolia were very friendly and hospitable, Miller said. In their culture, people should always open their door to strangers who may be traveling through the region.

"It's a survival technique. You've got to let people in because next time it could be you," she said.

She recalled going to a festival called Naadam, in which the whole city shuts down. It is a celebration of wrestling, horse racing and archery,

and people can buy flags and T-shirts like at a state fair.

Miller described the food as "horrific," especially for a vegetarian like herself. "What they eat is meat," she said.

The language did not even have a word for vegetables, she said. Anything green is considered grass.

Miller was in the program from June 12 through July 15. Following the research, Miller spent some time on her own camping in a national park.

Miller plans to continue with the program during the next two summers and hopes to travel to places like Belize, Costa Rica, Namibia, Trinidad and Peru.

Throughout the experience, Miller learned teaching techniques she can use in her own classroom. To obtain her degree, Miller needs to have her students formulate a project in which they will assess their environment, determine something they would like to change or improve and implement that change.

In addition, Miller will be able to see the projects other science teachers are implementing with their students online.

This is the 37-year-old Miller's third year teaching at Doane Stuart School, the private interfaith preparatory school for students in nursery through grade 12. The school is relocating to a new campus in Rensselaer this fall.

"It's such a wonderful place to be a teacher. I've got great kids, a great administration and we have a great new campus this year. I'll be able to walk to school," she said.

Miller said what she enjoys most about being a teacher is she can have her summers to travel and do research. The environment is her passion.

"I think the best way to try to effect change in the environment is to teach," she said.