

GRADE 5, MODULE 2A: UNIT 1, LESSON 2

Interview with Sloth Canopy Researcher: Bryson Voirin

What is your Job description?

I am a biologist studying the behavior and ecology of two- and three-toed sloths. Right now I am studying biology and ecology at New College of Florida, and working in the rainforests of Panama with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute.

What do you study now?

Basically I am trying to understand why sloths move so slowly, as well as a few other weird things about them. We use radio-collars to track sloth movements in the Algae that (exists) inside the hairs of sloths, something that normally does not occur in any other mammals. I am looking to see if maybe there is some benefit for the sloth to have algae.

What is the best thing about your job?

The best part of my job is getting to climb trees in the rainforest. Trees in the tropics are some of the biggest in the world, reaching over 150' tall. The view from the tops of the trees is amazing. A lot of times when I am up there troupes of monkeys come climbing by, sometimes stopping to look at me and wonder what I am doing up there with them.

What is the worst part about your job?

The worst thing, or hardest thing, is actually finding the sloths to start with. Sloths are very good at hiding. They usually live at the tops of trees, and can have greenish fur. We have to walk through the forest all day with our heads tilted up, looking for dark spots with hair. Sometimes it can take us weeks to find a single sloth.

What inspired you to first study science?

Ever since I was little, I was always fascinated with National Geographic magazine. I used to imagine I was one of the scientists in each issue, exploring unknown lands or catching wild animals. I always knew that was what I wanted to do.

What do you do in a typical day?

On a typical day working in Panama, I go out into the forest looking for sloths. I usually hike with someone else, and we use binoculars to look for the animals. When we find a sloth, I use my tree climbing gear to go up and catch it. Even though sloths are pretty slow animals, it can take hours to catch one once I am in the trees. They can move about as fast as you can walk fast, so in a tree 150' tall, it can be hard to catch them.

What advice would you give to someone interested in becoming a biologist?

I would tell anyone interested in working in biology to go outside and explore things. Walk through parks and natural lands. The things you can find in your own backyard can be really cool. If you start exploring young, it will stay with you forever.

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The Interview with Sloth Canopy Researcher: Bryson Voirin can be accessed via:

<http://www.thewildclassroom.com/biomes/scientistprofile/scientists/byrson.html>



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Journal Response Question (Homework for Lesson 2)

What features, or elements, in texts help you as a reader to learn more about rainforests?
