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Biology Faculty Member Will Track Ranaviruses at Georgetown Refuge

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Biology Faculty Member Will Track Ranaviruses at Georgetown Refuge

Quick Facts

- Biology faculty member Matthew Heard has official credentials to visit Hobcaw Barony, a 17,500-acre refuge near Georgetown, S.C., as a Harry M. Lightsey Jr. Visiting Scholar.
- Graduate student Jamie Salters and undergraduates Kara Hardwick and Elizabeth Ray will assist with Heard's research by collecting tissue samples and oral/cloacal swabs of the six potential host species found in the reserve in order to determine if they are at risk from ranaviruses.



Matt Heard

ROCK HILL, S.C. - Winthrop University biology faculty member **Matthew Heard** will travel to Georgetown, S.C., several times over the next year to study how ranaviruses are affecting amphibians and reptiles at the **Hobcaw Barony wildlife refuge**.

He has official credentials to visit the 17,500-acre refuge as a **Harry M. Lightsey Jr. Visiting Scholar**. The **Belle W. Baruch Foundation** which runs the refuge selected Heard as one of only two scholars for the upcoming year, according to **Hobcaw Barony Executive Director George Chastain**.

Heard was awarded a \$4,987 grant to offset expenses associated with the research.

Heard's proposal outlined how he would look at what is called the "**cold-blooded killer**."

"This is one of several diseases causing deformities, developmental problems or mass death," Heard said. "It is scary because it can hurt several different species."

The Wildlife Society News reported this spring that ranaviruses were discovered in the 1960s, yet their role in widespread die-offs of fish, amphibians and reptiles wasn't realized until the 1990s. Now scientists are moving quickly to determine what makes ranaviruses so deadly and capable of infecting so many hosts.

With one in three amphibian species and nearly half the turtles at risk of extinction, ranaviruses represent a significant threat to wildlife not only in South Carolina, but across the country, Heard said.

Similar studies have been conducted in the Southeast but none have been completed in South Carolina, he added.

Graduate student Jamie Salters and **undergraduates Kara Hardwick and Elizabeth Ray** will assist with Heard's research by collecting tissue samples and oral/cloacal swabs of the six potential host species found in the reserve in order to determine if they are at risk from ranaviruses.

Next summer Heard will submit his findings to the foundation. He anticipates publishing his research in a scientific journal and using the findings to write future grants to continue work on ranaviruses.

For more information, contact **Heard** at heardm@winthrop.edu.

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