

SIDEBAR:

ASU-Smithsonian partnership advances global classrooms

Doctoral student Kate Ihle, whose Arizona State University faculty advisors are Robert Page, dean of the School of Life Sciences, and Gro Amdam, an associate professor, will pursue a project on social structure with Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute scientists William Wcislo and Mary Jane West-Eberhard.

“We are working to understand how social systems adapt to changing environmental conditions,” Ihle says. “This project with the Smithsonian allows me to extend my work with social insects at ASU in new directions.”

Ihle will study two species of bees with flexible social organizations. *Megalopta genalis*, a sweat bee, is found on Barro Colorado Island, one of the “best known sites in the world for the study of lowland tropical forest.” *Euglossa Hyacinthina*, an orchid bee, is found in the clouds forests in Chiriqui Province, near the western border of Panama and Costa Rica. The scientists hope to set up live-streaming video as part of their field research, projecting activities of the insects into ASU classrooms.

“Imagine: undergraduate students could make real-time behavioral observations of animals and ecosystems, develop analyses and field techniques, in addition to interacting with Smithsonian scientists and students directly, online,” says Ihle. “It’s so exciting!”

Ihle sums up the impact of the Smithsonian-ASU partnership for her, thus: “The best part of studying at ASU is that I have both opportunities and exposure to a large, diverse research group, and extensive training and collaborative opportunities, such as this partnership with the Smithsonian; and I am grounded, with a tight knit community of colleagues in the social insect research group and fellow students.”