



James Pay

Eagle Dancer!

Animal Behaviourist

College of Sciences and Engineering, University of Tasmania

“How did I end up here?” ... is definitely what I was asking myself whilst dancing in a forest with multi-coloured ribbons and music blasting out from a huge speaker at full volume.

So, how did I end up here? Well, having always been interested in animals I applied for a degree in zoology at Aberystwyth University in Wales – that’s in the United Kingdom! Whilst at Aberystwyth I got to cut up dead sharks, chase insects and watch fish flirt. I then spent a year watching wild birds fight with each other in gardens around the UK to see which species was the heavy weight champion of the bird world!

After graduating, I moved to the mountains of the south of France to continue my studies into bird behaviour. I spent the next year giving blue tits and great tits (these are two types of bird) different puzzles to do. I then wanted to see if the clever birds would share their knowledge with their mates (turns out they do!).

From France I headed down here to Tassie, to study the endangered Tasmanian wedge-tailed eagle. The aim of my research is to find out as much as we can so that we can help them survive. As part of my research I put little trackers on the birds to see where they go, which will help us understand how we can protect them – it’s like google maps on a bird!

Also, despite how fearsome wedge-tailed eagles look, they are pretty scared of humans, especially when we get close to their nests. To protect these cowardly eagles we need to find out how far away from a nesting eagle people need to be to prevent disturbing them. This is where the dancing comes in... I dance at different distances from eagle nests to find out how close we can safely go. Dancing is science!

For more information:

www.utas.edu.au/zoology

