This summer, Dr. Aaron Haines and a class of 13 students from five PASSHE schools conducted a field study at the Chincoteague Bay Field Station (CBFS) in Wallops Island, Va. The students documented 90 terrestrial vertebrate species within Wallops Island National Wildlife Refuge and identified three new species that had not been previously documented within the refuge by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Conservation Biology course (BIOL 443) focuses on biological diversity, its threats and how to identify conservation strategies to protect against these threats through a series of experiments, sampling and case studies.

“My big goal for this course was to engage the students in my course to contribute to their professional career with a respected agency in their field of study, The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, while being active learners,” said Dr. Haines. “Working at a National Wildlife Refuge gave students a great life opportunity within a dynamic learning environment to practice professional field techniques, work as a team, handle wildlife, learn how to problem solve under difficult field conditions and understand how data gathered in the field helps guide management decisions.”

The course began on June 29 with the sampling/assessment period. July 8-17 was the data analysis portion of the course. When the students were not in class, they were doing activities such as snorkeling, owl calling, kayaking, fishing and visiting the Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge and Nature Conservancy.

The CBFS service learning and research experience provided a number of the core values of Our Bold Path including exploration, professionalism, public mission and integrity. Students had the opportunity to grow intellectually and personally to become professionals in their field of study.

Of the 13 students in the class, seven were from Millersville University, three from East Stroudsburg University and one from each West Chester University, Bloomsburg University and Slippery Rock University.

“That class really opened my eyes to different parts of conservation. I also learned a lot of useful techniques that will help me in my career,” said ESU student Taylor Layden. “Seeing [Dr. Haines’] passion for conservation has inspired me to go more into the conservation aspect of marine biology.”

Conservation Biology (BIOL 443) was part of a service learning effort coupled with a research based course format to increase student professional development and passion for STEM studies in the biological sciences, in compliance with the goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Refuge System and the college students from this Chincoteague Bay Field Station. For more information, please visit www.cbfieldstation.org.