

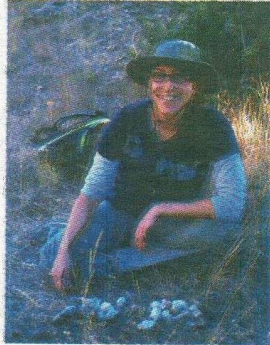
Birthright Armenia Alumna Ozbenian Returns to Armenia with Fulbright Grant

Serda Ozbenian, 33, recently got the exciting news that she received a prestigious Fulbright Program Study/Research Grant to conduct non-invasive population surveys of wolves and bears in Armenia. Serda, an alumna of George Mason University, will be working collaboratively with the American University of Armenia's Acopian Center for the Environment and local communities on the project. She is the fifth Birthright Armenia participant to have received a Fulbright and most certainly will not be the last!

From March through December 2015, Serda will leave Takoma Park, Maryland behind to be in Armenia to further her studies on bears and wolves. She will continue the work begun on her thesis "Survey of Attitudes Toward, Conflicts With, and Management of Wolves and Bears in Rural Villages in Armenia."

"As my graduate research showed, both species are involved in conflicts with rural villagers in Armenia. Bears are considered a vulnerable population, but wolves receive no special protection and are hunted. This project will help us estimate the populations of wolves and bears in the country, which is necessary for any proper wildlife management," explains Serda.

Serda is no newcomer to Ar-



Serda Ozbenian during a hike in the Caucasus Wildlife Refuge in Armenia

menia. She has broad experience with Armenia's environmental issues, as she has been serving as the executive director of the non-profit Armenian Environmental Network since 2007. As a Birthright Armenia participant in 2010, she worked for the Foundation for the Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Assets (FPWC) in Armenia as part of her volunteer job placement with the Armenian Volunteer Corps.

Since her initial volunteer service trip, Serda has returned to Armenia three times, and gets further engaged and embedded in the country's environmental challenges each time. "I am very honored to receive the prestigious Fulbright grant and excited to work with my colleagues in Armenia on this important project to increase our global understanding of human-wildlife conflict and the state of wolf and bear populations in this region of the world."

Serda is currently fundraising for necessary equipment and materials related to the project. For anyone interested in learning more, or making a donation to this worthy project, please email Serda at serda.ozbenian@gmail.com.

Birthright Armenia's mission is to strengthen ties between the homeland and diasporan youth by affording them an opportunity to be a part of Armenia's daily life and to contribute to Armenia's development through work, study and volunteer experiences, while developing a renewed sense of Armenian identity. For more information, please visit our website at www.birthrightarmenia.org.