

Young Scientists Seek Answers on Blue King Crab Decline

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Michelle Ridgeway, left, William Lekanof, Anthony Lekanof and Dani Mercurief are pictured before the NOAA vessel Rainier.

Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Schools out for summer, which means most teenagers are relishing the three months of freedom before they have to hit the books again come fall. But for three high school students from St. George Island in the Pribilofs, the learning hasn't stopped.

William Lekanof, Dani Mercurief and Anthony Lekanof have been researching Pribilof Island blue king crab ecology for the past five years. They recently visited Kodiak to learn about different research techniques being used by the NOAA, University of Alaska Fairbanks and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game.

William Lekanof said the hope is to use incorporate those tools with their current research on blue king crab.

"We're trying to study the blue king crab right now, it's kind of a rare species. It's kind of going down, the count of them are going down anyway."

The students spent two days touring various research labs, and even had the opportunity to learn about multibeam sonar mapping while onboard the

NOAA ship Rainier. Anthony Lekanof said that was a particularly interesting research method currently being used.

“We actually got to see how their sonar penetrates the ocean floor to map out what the ocean looks like. And so if you take satellite images, those are kind of blurred up images about what it might look like on the bottom. But they take real life picture. Like they could see sunken ships, crashed planes, and they could basically see anything that’s under them, using their sonar.”

Dani Merculief said sonar mapping could be useful in trying to track blue king crab.

“We were able to see images that were similar to what they were doing. Their job is to find out the ocean bottom for that subject. And that would really help our turn on things because we’re not really sure about where blue king crab are living right now. Because of the objectives that they’d have to go against, I guess you could say. We just need to find where they might be. Finding the ocean floor might be the first way to go.”

Merculief said meeting various biologists and learning about the breadth of tools available for research was well worth the trip to Kodiak. But more than that, she said she’s excited to use those tools for studying the Pribilofs.

“I’ve been inspired by the so many biologists and scientists that I’ve been able to meet, all the opportunities. I’m thinking I really want to make it a career for me as I get older. The most part is it’s really awesome to be able to see our island, not just being our home, but being this big, this big whole other world that no one knows about.”

The trio will take what they learned during their time in Kodiak and share it with students at the Pribilof Marine Science Camp next week, where all three will be working.

You can listen to the full interview with the young scientists that aired on KMXT’s Talk of the Rock by visiting our website at [kmxt dot org](http://www.kmxt.org).