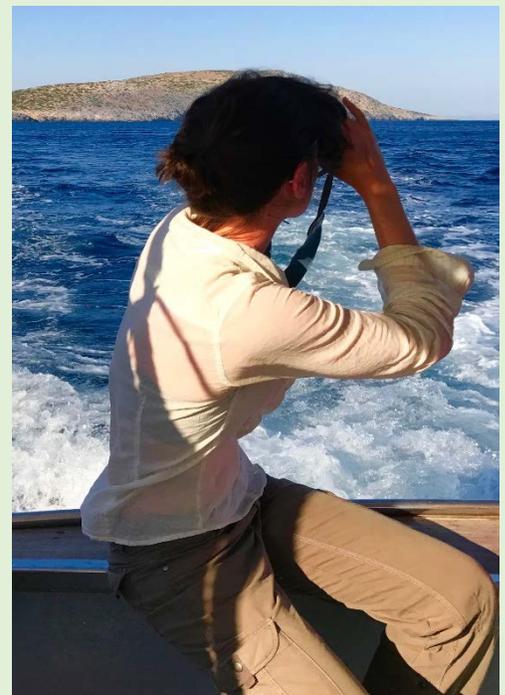




Kinsey working with the crew from the BBC, as they film the lizards she researching, *Podarcis erhardii*.

I first enrolled at the University of Michigan as an Art & Design student, where making the move from a small farm town in southeast Michigan to life as an art student in Ann Arbor was a culture shock. It was ARTDES 250 (but really the professor) that helped me find my niche at the interface of visual arts and science. I joined Professor Joe Trumpey, ten Art & Design undergrads, and one SNRE grad student on a field sketching trip to the Chihuahuan desert through the Eco-Explorers program. This experiential field course was an interdisciplinary program that combined my interests in art, science, and the environment. Nights camping in the open-air, living our days by the light, and surviving off what I could carry sparked a change in me and the way I perceive my world in ways I'm still trying to process and articulate. I became more aware, more appreciative, and more concerned about the natural world and the resources and sincere wonder with which it sustains us. Upon returning from the desert, I made the decision to enroll in the dual degree program to obtain my B.A. in Art & Design and B.S. in Environment.

I immediately felt at home in Program in the Environment and gravitated toward conservation and biology. I liked the idea of using biological and ecological knowledge to protect species, habitats, and ecosystems. My classes in ecology, conservation biology, and environmental issues inspired me to join a lab and assist in research with the help of my PitE mentor, Dr. Paul Webb. My lab experience took me to the UM Biological Station for fieldwork, which solidified my interest in biological field research. So of course I jumped at the opportunity to join the Eco-Explorers again for a trip around the world to Madagascar, where we'd assist SNRE graduate students in sustainability research and field sketch amongst the most unusual flora and fauna.



Habitat hopping to gather data on *Podarcis erhardii*, the lizard she's researching.



The inspirational chameleon, *Furcifer lateralis*, in Madagascar.

I left Madagascar with an insatiable thirst for all things reptilian. If the reptiles were evolving on islands, all the more perfect. I decided pursue grad work in conservation ecology in SNRE because I found an advisor working on lizard evolution in the Greek islands – my dream research. During my master's I worked as a TA and curatorial assistant at the Natural History Museum of Zoology's Herpetology Division. Cataloguing chameleons and digitizing field notebooks from herpetological expeditions ignited an enthusiasm for biodiversity and exploration that guided me through my master's research on the evolution of anti-predator in island lizards. I studied lizards from more than 20 Greek islands, and loved writing about them so much that I decided to go for my Ph.D. in biology at the University of California, Merced.

The day Eco-Explorers landed in Antannarivo, Madagascar is etched in my mind forever. The slightest eye movement gave it away, what otherwise would have been a perfect camouflage performance. And suddenly another moved around to look directly at me - a stunning black and white conical eye. The eye belonged to a chameleon, *Furcifer lateralis*, to be exact. I spent the rest of the trip hunting for, sketching, and studying chameleons and other endemic lizards. That was the transformative moment for me – in that garden in Madagascar I knew I had fallen completely in love with reptiles, island biology, and evolution.



Getting caffeinated while island/habitat hopping Greek Islands for research!



Kinsey with PitE undergrad Mike Rockwell, and lab assistants from UC-Merced.

I am currently a Ph.D. candidate in Quantitative & Systems Biology in Dr. Danielle Edwards' Lab. My dissertation is focused on the evolutionary drivers of color and pattern traits in lizards that are related to speciation. I am still working in the Greek islands with my beloved *Podarcis erhardii* as my study system as a National Geographic Explorer. Now I take curious undergraduates across the world with me to kayak to unexplored islands in search of lizards, and mentor them on their journey to becoming strong scientists. Our work on the unusual feeding behaviors of small island lizards was recently picked up by the BBC, and we had a great time collaborating with current PitE undergrads on the filming.



Kinsey being filmed by the BBC about her research with lizards in Greece.



Posing at the UM Nat History Museum as an undergrad at commencement.

The University of Michigan and Program in the Environment gave me a wider window into the world from where I grew up. Some days in the field or the lab I look about me and cannot get over how wonderful and mysterious nature is and how much I've grown by observing it. I often think about the Agassiz quote emblazoned on the entrance of the UM Natural History Museum, "*Go to nature. Take the facts into your own hands. Look and see for yourself.*"