Graduate student profile:

Rowshyra Castañeda
Ecology & Evolutionary Biology; 3rd year PhD, Mandrak Lab (UTSC) & Weyl Lab (South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiveristy)

Previous degrees:
BSc & MSc (Biology) McGill University

Tell us about your research at UTSC:
I am currently developing novel methods to detect and quantify rare freshwater fishes. Specifically, I am assessing the use of underwater cameras, as it is a non-invasive tool, in other words does not cause stress or mortality of fishes at risk of extinction. I am combining mathematical models, experiments, and fieldwork to develop this method.

Tell us about why you chose your graduate program or lab:
I chose to get my PhD at UTSC because I really wanted to work with my supervisor, Nick Mandrak. His applied work in conservation and ecology is what I'm most passionate about, so it our research interests are completely in line. Also, I get to do a lot of international work as my co-supervisor is based in South Africa.

Tell us about any fellowships you hold / have held in grad school:
I currently hold a scholarship from the Fonds de recherche nature et technologies du Québec.

What are your future career goals and how has your graduate work set you up to achieve those goals?
I'm still juggling as to whether I want to stay in academia or not. Luckily, I'm in a setting that allows me to explore different research questions, work with different government & non-government environmental groups, and contribute to public outreach; therefore, I am confident that once I do make a decision, I'll be prepared. All the graduate work and extracurricular activities I participate in here at UTSC, is really allowing me to develop my hard and soft skills.

Complete the sentence:
In my free time I like ....... to cook, bake, hike, SCUBA dive, and travel.

Do you have any advice for prospective students?
Don’t be afraid to ask questions and develop your own ideas! Also, if you’re looking into applying for lab, do your research, and if you get to meet with the other grad students of the lab, ask them tons of questions about lab dynamics, supervisor expectations, student life, etc. You don’t want to be stuck at a university or in a lab that doesn’t fit well with your life philosophy.
Tell us about your craziest experimental finding or experience:
My craziest experimental finding was by accident. While doing fieldwork for my Masters I noticed perfectly spherical objects and weird looking organisms in my samples. I decided to look into both these things as side projects. The perfectly spherical objects ended up being microbeads and the weird organisms were nonindigenous bryozoans never seen in the river. Both these side project discoveries lead to publications. Keep your eyes open, you'll never know what you’ll discover.