Rita Grunberg was born and raised in West Orange, New Jersey where she attended high school. When she came to Rutgers, she quickly realized that she wanted to major in Ecology and Natural Resources, and she has never looked back. Some of her favorite classes include limnology, ornithology and vertebrate zoology. She stumbled upon the world of parasites in her parasite ecology class. In this class they dissected fish and extracted live worms, which was very exciting! After finding her first real, live parasite she was hooked. Rita joined Dr. Michael Sukhdeo’s lab fall semester of her junior year to investigate parasites of macroinvertebrates. She has now almost completed her G. H. Cook Honors thesis entitled “Seasonality of Gregarine Parasites (Eugregarina; Rontundula sp. and Heliospora sp.) in Amphipods (Gammarus fascitcus) in the North Branch of the Raritan River.” Her studies have elucidated the overwintering strategies of gregarine parasites (a rarely studied group), and she has recovered two tentative new species that are now being described. Her abstract was accepted, and she is presenting her research in an oral talk at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Parasitologists in Quebec this June.

On top of her studies, Rita is active in the student community. She is the President of the Naturalist’s Club, which is totally organized and run by the undergraduates. The club has a vital role in fostering a sense of community in the ecology program and it is a nexus for student/student and student faculty interactions. A faculty member or graduate student will often serve as guides on trips. For example, they visited the Camden Aquarium and next week they will be going out to catch frogs with Dr. Lathrop.

Her high academic standing, her research and her important contributions to the community service serve as a role model for other students. For this, Rita is being awarded the James Applegate Award for Outstanding Student in Wildlife Conservation. After graduation in May, Rita will be attending graduate school at Rutgers University under the supervision of Dr. Michael Sukhdeo.