



WHY VOLUNTEER

Greetings fellow wildlife enthusiasts! My name is Meredith and I currently work for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, having previously obtained my BS in Conservation Biology and my MS in Environmental Science. My time at Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center was instrumental in shaping my courses of study and my career path, and if you do not already help out at SWVaWC here's why you should consider it:

- ✎ It will help you understand why, if you find two tiny naked birds at the foot of a tree, you should NOT consider raising them yourself before taking them to a licensed rehabilitator.
- ✎ I started volunteering in 2009 and can tell you, you will get to feed songbirds from day one! You will also learn all the types of worms and maggots that birds love!
- ✎ You will experience the thrill of holding a warm, fluffy wild songbird in your hand after catching the escapee when it got too excited about feeding time.
- ✎ If you find birds mildly interesting, as I did when I started volunteering, you will get to experience the amazing world of avifauna up close and personal, and your interest may morph into full-fledged mania (example: I now have three birds of my own. Never saw it coming!).
- ✎ If you are a student that enjoys volunteering and can keep up with the challenges and fast pace of wildlife rehab, you may be a good fit for an internship, which I pursued during the summers of 2010 and 2011. Internships are truly immersive and allow you to get involved with almost every species that comes through SWVAWC's doors.
- ✎ You may get to work with and release chimney swifts.
- ✎ You may get to bond with a viciously entertaining woodpecker fledgling.
- ✎ You will appreciate woodchucks in an entirely new way (just don't get between them and their sweet potato).
- ✎ You will get to assist with medical procedures to help heal a range of maladies that present in native wildlife.
- ✎ You will learn how to cope with the loss of wild patients, and turn this into an educational experience with Lucky's necropsy mentorship.
- ✎ You will have the opportunity to work alongside and learn from some amazing volunteers (Jill, Michelle, Kim and Karen during my time) and interns (Amy, Lauren, Kinner, Jon, Angelia, Hannah and Lydia just to name a few).

- ✎ You will witness Sabrina's wealth of wildlife knowledge, creativity and remarkable standard of care and hopefully that will rub off on you and keep you coming back for more! I kept coming back until I moved to Wisconsin (and even that won't keep me away).
- ✎ If you are a student, your experience may inspire you to take courses in wildlife health and conservation, or even to present on the threats facing native wildlife. My wildlife handling experience was especially handy when I trapped and tagged mice for my Master's thesis (and I even got to do some birding while in the field).
- ✎ You will gain valuable skills in interacting with the public and maintaining records. These certainly helped me land my current job (and Sabrina's recommendation sealed the deal!).
- ✎ You may even be able to help out with website content and design, or create educational materials to help promote the wonderful work this facility accomplishes.
- ✎ It's not always easy, but it can certainly be fun! When a grackle throws a peanut at you, you know the final goal of release back into the wild is almost at hand. Releasing a bird and watching it glide into the distance, then picking the feathers loose feathers off your clothing, is an incomparable moment.
- ✎ My experience at Southwest Virginia Wildlife Center was life-changing. I have gained a true passion for hands-on wildlife conservation. Once I moved to Wisconsin, I volunteered for Four Lakes Wildlife Center during the summer of 2014 and plan to conduct habitat restoration work during the summer of 2015.
- ✎ Finally, you will join a community where people from all walks of life come together to help wildlife and, at least in my case, you will always feel like a part of that.