

Animal Care Project 2020

PROJECT LEADER: Shannon Steele Shannon.Steele@calvertcountymd.gov

In 2021, the project will transition to Kim Curren kimberly.curren@calvertcountymd.gov

PROJECT GOALS: To assist staff with care of nature center animals while providing unique volunteer opportunities.

SKILLS NEEDED

- Capable of reading and following detailed instructions.
- Proficient at keeping detailed records.
- Can use and tare food scales.
- Comfortable working in close proximity to animals like snakes, mice, spiders, and birds of prey
- Adept at observing animal behaviors and adjusting what they do in close proximity to those animals. For example, if a snake is hiding in its box, the volunteer may determine that it's not a good idea to extract the snake from the box in order to handle it.
- Able to bend and stoop and carry buckets of water up to about 10 pounds.

Optional But Preferred Skills

- Experience working with raptors and reptiles is a plus.

REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

- Must be able to tolerate strong animal odors and cleaning waste materials from cages
- Will feed live crickets and thawed mice/chicks to some of the animals.
- Raptor volunteers assist with food preparations including removal of thawed prey intestines.
- Will work independently or in family teams.
 - **Animal Care Minimum Age:** Children as young as 10 may help with general animal care only under the supervision of a trained adult.
 - **Raptor Care Minimum Age:** 18 and up.
- Must be comfortable handling turtles (up to about a foot long) and non-venomous snakes (up to 5ft long).
- Although staff and volunteers take precautions, they should understand that there is still risk involved when working with animals, such bites, scratches, and exposure to bacteria.

VOLUNTEER DUTIES

- **General Animal Care**
 - Weigh & thaw food for raptors
 - Feed, scrub and bask turtles
 - Feed the mice, frogs, skink, crickets & tarantula.
 - Clean cages and change water.
 - In warm weather, bask the smaller turtles outdoors.
- **Raptors**
 - Food prep
 - Placing food in the barred owl & screech cages
 - Scrubbing poop from perches, etc.

- Removing pellets
- Cleaning water pans
- Replacing browse (tree branches)
- Recording video clips of the naturalists' training sessions with the hawk & barn owl, using their phones
- Observing the birds' feeding behaviors and keeping records of it
- Occasionally we may need help with:
 - Being extra hands to hold raptors steady while staff trim beaks & talons
 - Power washing cages & carpets
 - Replacing perches and turf

VOLUNTEER TRAININGS

- **Volunteer trainings are suspended until further notice due to COVID restrictions**
- **RAPTOR TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS:**
 - **In order to qualify to sign up for raptor care/feeding**, volunteers first need to do a 2-hour training. After that they will need to make arrangements to come in and care for the raptors on a day when staff are here to answer questions which may arise. After that point, the volunteer will be qualified to respond to raptor care & feeding opportunities on the Galaxy Digital Volunteer Portal <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>.
 - **In order to maintain qualifications**, volunteers need to sign up for raptor opportunities at least once/month. If it has been longer than a month, raptor volunteers need to arrange a time to meet with staff for a requalification training.
- **ANIMAL CARE TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS:**
 - **In order to qualify to sign up for animal care**, volunteers first need to do a 2-hour training. Then they will need to make arrangements to come in to do animal care on a day when staff are here to answer questions. After that the volunteer will be qualified to respond to animal care opportunities on the Galaxy Digital Volunteer Portal <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>.
 - **In order to maintain qualifications**, volunteers need to sign up for animal care opportunities at least once/month. If it has been longer than a month, volunteers need to arrange a time to meet with staff for a requalification training.

PROJECT DATES

- As-needed, there will be a couple of seasonal big-cleaning days per year.
- Until October 2019, trainings were usually offered once/month, and volunteer opportunities were offered daily, year-round (except during holidays & renovations).
- During renovations (Nov 2019-Feb 2020) there were no trainings for new volunteers, but veteran volunteers could still sign up for opportunities.
- From March 2020-Dec 2020, there were no new trainings for volunteers due to COVID 19. In addition, veteran volunteers were not permitted inside the nature center.

SUMMARY OF 2020 ACTIVITIES

There were few volunteer opportunities for animal care in 2020, between nature center renovations and COVID 19.

2020 VOLUNTEER HOURS: 29.5 from January 3, 2020 - March 13, 2020

2020 VOLUNTEERS:

- Angela Morrow
- Aaron Richmond
- John Sullens

2020 UPDATES:

- The skink, both old “working mice,” and both tree frogs passed away in 2020. Since the nature center was closed to the public all year, we decided not to seek replacements for the skink and frogs until re-opening to alleviate some of the animal care workload for a reduced office staff and to decrease the cost of food & supplies.
- Gene Groshon got a new working mouse in October for raptor trapping, and we decided that when we got another, we would keep them in separate cages to reduce the odor and injuries from fighting. The new lavender bedding mixed with the shavings has also helped with odor.
- Shannon created a new shift door track for Buddy’s crate so that it would slide more smoothly and be less likely to startle him.
- A heat lamp was added to the hawk’s mew to help him thermoregulate in winter. We also added a system of turf-covered ramps and perches to make it easier for this one-winged bird to navigate and making it easier on his joints.
- Shannon got new rubber water pans for the screech owls and added turf perches to the one side to make it easier for them to get in & out.
- Shannon replaced the heavy horse mat with a suction cupped shower mat in the hawk’s water pan to make it easier to clean while still providing traction.
- When COVID prevented me from working with the raptors consistently, Shannon spoke with supervisors Karyn Molines & Andy Brown who thought it was a good idea to begin the transition of having other staff train the birds instead, making the transition run more smoothly when Shannon leave. Shannon continue to be available as a resource and to make recommendations for animal care.
- Shannon contacted our IAATE mentor, Amy Fennell, about this transition, and she was happy to continue to mentor Kim as needed. Shannon shared contact info with both.
- Shannon created a training video for staff using video clips from the NEI Birds of Prey Workshop Shannon attended in November 2019.
- Shannon continued to attend virtual NEI Tech Talk Workshops and shared info with other staff.
- Shannon has been working with hourly naturalist, Kim Curren, so that she can take over the animal care project when Shannon leaves, or at least until my replacement is hired.

RECOMMENDED STAFF TRAININGS

- A new IAATE membership needs to be created for Kim so that she has access to trainings and the member forum.
- Kim & Grace Hanners should attend the virtual IAATE Conference in March 2021 and share info with other staff.
- Kim & Grace should attend virtual webinars sponsored by IAATE and NEI throughout the year so they can continue to learn and share info with other staff.
- All animal care staff should periodically review IAATE & NEI webinar recordings along with Shannon’s Recording of the Nov 2019 NEI Birds of Prey Workshop.

FUTURE PLANS

- Continue to train the hawk for enrichment and the barn owl so that he will be program-ready. Meanwhile, we will use the screech owls for programs but using guidelines that will minimize the amount of stress they're exposed to.
- Continue to update changes to mews, water pan access for barred owl, padded turf perches for barred owl, and safety vestibules for the hawk and screech cages.
- Discuss plans for screech owl exhibit when back deck is renovated. Due to lack of sunlight and potential mold growth on the back deck, Shannon would recommend moving them out to the empty cage, and put a divider in it.
- Yearly assess quality of life for all raptors, especially the hawk who at a certain point may need to be humanely euthanized when his disability causes him discomfort, inability to eat effectively, etc.

History and Current Ages of the Nature Center's Raptors

BUDDY the BARN OWL (male) 3 years old in May 2020

Arrived August 15, 2017 from Deron Meador of Adventures with Raptors. Was 3 months old at the time, so that means that he hatched in May 2017

No injuries; however, because he hatched in captivity and was hand-fed, he is non-releasable.

RED-TAILED HAWK (male) age 18 in spring 2020

Arrived in Jan 2010 from Nanjemoy Env. Ed Center. They had gotten another red-tail from a falconer and were looking for a new home for this one.

Injured as a fledgling in 2002. He was found after he was injured, so it's unknown if he had a crash landing or was hit by a car, etc.

Vet amputated wing after a few months because the hawk was tripping over the wing and would sometimes bite it when eating.

Shannon worked with a 30-year old red tail at NEI, so we could have him another 10+ years.

EASTERN SCREECH OWL- Brown Phase (sex unknown) age 11 in spring 2020

Was hit by a car in 2009

Arrived March 20, 2010 estimated to be almost 1 year old at the time. Came from rehabber in Davidsonville where one of our counselors was volunteering

Left eye damaged. Although one-eyed owls can survive in the wild, rehabilitators haven't had much success releasing hatch year birds, probably because he didn't get to spend time learning necessary hunting skills from his parents.

EASTERN SCREECH OWL- Red Phase (sex unknown) at least age 8 in spring 2020

Arrived Summer 2014 from Orphaned Wildlife in Lusby

Cannot fly well. We don't know how he was injured or how long he was at Orphaned Wildlife.

Another nature center has a screech owl that's 18, so we may have them a few more years.

BARRED OWL (female) (age unknown) at least age 4 in spring 2020

Arrived in April 2018

Hit by a car near intersection of Rte 301 & 50

Head injury, one eye removed and sight compromised in the remaining eye, can fly

Still has extreme escape/avoidance behaviors when people are in her cage. Continue to provide browse and think of ways to minimize stress and reduce the amount of time we spend in her mew.

Cope her beak and talons in her cage.

Create water pan access from outside cage.

OTHER EXHIBIT ANIMALS IN OUR COLLECTION AS OF DECEMBER 2020

- Snakes
 - 2 corn snakes
 - eastern king snake
 - eastern rat snake
- Turtles
 - 2 diamondback terrapins (at least 17 years old)
 - albino snapping turtle (will be 30 in 2021)
 - red-eared slider
 - red-bellied cooter
 - eastern painted turtle
- Other
 - Fancy mouse (for raptor trapping)
 - Chilean rose tarantula
 - Pumpkinseed Fish
 - Feeder Crickets

Supporting Calvert County's nature parks and natural spaces



CALVERT STEWARDS

VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

A partnership between Calvert Nature Society and Calvert County Natural Resources Division

Date of Issue February 2021

CALVERT STEWARDS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM
c/o Natural Resources Division
2880 Grays Road
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Volunteer Portal <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>

Calvert Nature Society: www.calvertparks.org

Calvert County Natural Resources Division:
www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources

