

Exploring the Role of The Wild Animal Sanctuary in Captive Wildlife Education through a Community Service Internship Experience

Honors Thesis

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By

Aubrey Spencer
Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology

Nicole T. Stafford, Human Dimensions of Natural Resources
Cecilia White, Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology

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Aubrey Spencer

University Honors Program, Colorado State University

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Nicole T. Stafford, M.S., MBA

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Published research on captive wildlife has a distinct focus on zoos and aquariums. These facilities are known worldwide for their entertainment value, with conservation being a more recent intended focus (Fernandez & Chiew, 2021). My internship experience at The Wild Animal Sanctuary (TWAS) gave me a unique opportunity to explore a different and understudied type of captive wildlife facility: a sanctuary. The question that drove my research was: How do sanctuaries differ from traditional zoos in their educational impact? Between my exploration of the topic and my internship experience, I discovered that animal sanctuaries are a valuable alternative to traditional zoos, for both ethical and conservation education reasons.

The Intersection of Research with Personal Experience

Animal sanctuaries have several notable differences from traditional captive wildlife facilities. In a comprehensive review of existing literature, Speiran (2025) concluded that sanctuaries are represented far less in the literature than zoos. This phenomenon is highlighted with the term “sanctuary gap”, representing the lack of attention sanctuaries receive despite filling a significant role in captive wildlife education. Sanctuaries, unlike zoos, focus and educate on individual animals and the hardships they have faced, facilitating relatability and encouraging empathy. Traditional zoos, on the other hand, keep things more upbeat and focus instead on global conservation issues and human impacts (McElroy, 2015). It makes sense why zoos are easier to research and write about than sanctuaries, but this does not warrant erasure of the impact sanctuaries make.

As TWAS's sole education intern, I was responsible for accurately and effectively educating sanctuary guests about the animals, and more specifically, the captive wildlife crisis. Before this internship, I had not heard captive wildlife described using this term before, but it is entirely fitting; a shocking statistic by Armstrong et. al. (2024) reveals that there are five times the number of tigers in captivity as in the wild. With statistics like this illustrating the crisis, it is difficult to understand how zoos get around educating about the negative effects of captivity, particularly for individuals. However, it makes sense when you consider the goals of these different facilities. TWAS made it clear that their goal is preventing more wild animals from being kept in captivity, particularly in abusive or neglectful situations. Zoos, on the other hand, have a broader, more species-centric view on animals in captivity. While TWAS does not advertise their opinion on captive breeding programs and animals being in captivity for a conservation reason, this is the main driver for zoos. The difference in overarching goals between these two facility types makes it difficult to compare them ethically.

Regardless of their conservation methods, both facility types intend to educate the public about the animals and garner support for their respective causes. In a 2007 study, Ballantyne et. al. found that wildlife education is most effective when it connects emotionally with visitors and provides visitors with everyday actions they can take to help. In the study, the authors describe the importance of establishing empathy through storytelling. Storytelling was at the forefront of what I did working at the sanctuary. Nearly every time I spoke to a guest, I incorporated a rescue story of one of the sanctuary's animals. It was fascinating to see the emotions I could evoke from guests. I watched many people go from talking about how cool an animal was to talking about

how cruel people can be and how happy they are for the animal, just from me sharing a few sentences. This personal discovery aligns with a study by Clayton (2018), who found that conservation awareness was greatly affected by personal narratives and emotional engagement. That is the true power of establishing empathy, and the true power of animal sanctuaries.

One of my first observations about The Wild Animal Sanctuary was how visually different it was compared to zoos I had visited previously. Unlike zoos, the sanctuary does not rely on flashy signage, animal tricks, and live demonstrations. While these can be great attention-getters, the sanctuary prefers to let the animals speak for themselves. Guests are not taught to care about tigers because of how big, fast, or cool they are. Instead, they are taught about tiger siblings Ella and Ray, who were dropped off in the sanctuary parking lot as cubs with malnutrition and metabolic bone disease, but are now thriving in an expansive habitat where they can run and play to their heart's content. The method focused on the animals as individuals clearly elicits a stronger emotional reaction. Recent and ongoing research on animal welfare and enrichment supports the sanctuary's model of individualistic care (Puehringer-Sturmayr et al., 2023).

As I have explored in other research papers over the years, enrichment is an absolutely crucial element of captive wildlife care. While only a few animals at the sanctuary ever experienced life in the wild, they all have instinctual wild behaviors that are programmed to exhibit (Kresnye et al., 2022). If they are not able to display these behaviors, their health and happiness may suffer (Kusumaningsih and Rosiana, 2023). Another enrichment study by Puehringer-Sturmayr et al. (2023) focused on food, emphasizing how enrichment can be

incorporated in every aspect of an animal's life, and particularly during feeding time. The way in which the animals are fed greatly affects the quality and number of natural behaviors they express, which also has important implications for wildlife education (Puehringer-Sturmayer et al., 2023). When guests witness an animal actively foraging or manipulating their food, they are learning about that species' natural feeding behaviors.

During my internship, I saw elements of food-based enrichment in action. Animals were fed at different times every day, mimicking how the animals might eat in the wild. Bears, specifically, were given a wide variety of food with different textures and flavors, so they never knew what mealtime would bring. Even the large carnivores experience food enrichment through frozen meat blocks, which helps the animals cool off in the summer and move their food around their habitat with ease. While these enrichment tactics do not necessarily mimic feeding habits in the wild, they add interest and variety to animal lives (Kresnye et al., 2022). These feeding strategies do not just benefit the animals' welfare; they also serve as educational opportunities for the public. Unlike in many traditional zoos, where enrichment and feeding are often done behind the scenes, The Wild Animal Sanctuary makes these natural behaviors visible to guests. Seeing a fox dragging its meal or a bear using its paws to rummage through a food pile allows guests to connect with the animals on a deeper level. Getting to prepare and even offer food to these animals showed me how important feeding time was for the animals and the guest learning experience.

Throughout my research on captive animal facilities, the idea of animal choice comes up frequently. While zoos claim that their ambassador animals have the option of not participating

in shows and demonstrations, the animals may only participate because they do not have enough enrichment outside of these demonstrations, or because they have never known anything else in life. Ambassador animals can benefit education drastically, but conversely, there are extreme animal welfare risks associated with a lack of natural behavior and mistreatment (Spooner et al., 2021). TWAS, on the other hand, is ruled by animal choice. If an animal does not want to be seen, it will not be, and it really is that simple. That is a difficult pill to swallow for guests used to the on-demand feel of zoos or aquariums. When I was talking to guests, I noticed this was specifically a struggle for young kids. Miller et al. (2012) developed the “PEAK” (Promoting Environmental Awareness in Kids) model for assessing conservation awareness in children, which talks about more than just fact retention. Instead, it focuses on assessing children’s ethical frameworks, which is necessary for true conservation education. So, instead of throwing a statistic at the kids to change their minds, I attempted to frame the situation as a positive. I did not apologize to them that they could not see a particular animal; I let them know that the animals were exercising the freedom they have never had before, which is an incredible privilege to witness.

The magic of TWAS is that they do not require the same attention-grabbing shows and signage to have a significant impact on guest perception of animal welfare and captive wildlife. Human, animal, and environmental factors are considered when guests are deciding their perceptions about a captive wildlife facility (Phillips et al., 2024). Welfare perceptions greatly influence later actions and whether people show continued support after leaving the facility (Phillips et al., 2024). During my guest interactions, I witnessed countless inspired people at the sanctuary who asked me how they could donate, become involved in volunteering, or bring

others to visit the sanctuary in the future. This anecdotal feedback shows the effectiveness of TWAS at establishing emotional connections and long-term supporters.

My internship at The Wild Animal Sanctuary forever changed how I think about captive wildlife education. No formal activity or event is required to inspire profound changes in perception and education. Sanctuaries often perform conservation work outside of the typical frameworks used to measure educational effectiveness, which may be why they are typically underestimated (Speiran, 2025). However, even informal experiences such as questions and conversations can have lasting effects (Clayton, 2018). My internship taught me that every interaction could be a crucial teaching opportunity. A simple question posed to me could be the difference between someone donating or not, becoming a volunteer or not, caring or not. Where before I viewed popular and flashy zoos as the default option for wildlife education, I now recognize animal sanctuaries as an invaluable alternative. Though understudied in past literature, the value of animal sanctuaries is exemplified both by new research and by my priceless internship experience.

Internship Journal

For my honors thesis, I chose the community service option, which allowed me to donate my time and skills in education to The Wild Animal Sanctuary. Over the course of four weeks, I interned on-site, contributing to educational programming and outreach efforts. Each day, I journaled about my experiences, reflecting on what I observed, learned, and contributed. The journal portion of my thesis is rough by design. While my writing above has been thoroughly proofread and edited, the journal below is in-the-moment, authentic, and possibly messy. Including both polished writing and spontaneous writing was important for my process, allowing me to document my exact thoughts and feelings as they were happening. I believe this adds relatability, authenticity, and potential for deeper reflection on my experience.

May 16th, 2025: Training

My training shift started at 10:00 a.m., and I quickly learned that I was not just the only education intern, but I was the first education intern in the whole time that the volunteer coordinator (Courtney) had worked there. This made me a little nervous, as I would be the only one carrying out some of those duties. However, I also realized that I had a lot more creative freedom within my position. Courtney let me know that the schedule was fairly flexible and that I could organize it based on what I most wanted to get out of the internship. That made me really excited, as I really want to be creative in this position and design new experiences for both myself and sanctuary guests. However, I'm a little bit intimidated by the amount of information that I need to learn. In order to effectively do my job, I will need to know the rescue stories of

many sanctuary animals. Going into this, I was thinking that I'd be educating more about the wild behaviors of these species, but now I know that I'm teaching more about individuals. So, it's less about teaching the public about the animals in their wild environments and more about teaching them empathy for these specific animals. It also focuses a lot more on the captive wildlife crisis than I thought it would, but it totally makes sense this way. The animals they rescue at the sanctuary come from people being irresponsible with their ownership of wild animals. I get to educate against these behaviors, instead encouraging people to keep wild animals wild. Today, I asked Courtney if seeing a tiger 30 feet away from you wandering around in a natural environment ever becomes less magical. She assured me that it does not.

I was a little stressed going into this training. But then I heard the lions roaring from their habitat, and I saw a tiger walking happily through the grass to take a dip in a pond. Then, I remembered why I wanted to do this internship in the first place. I remembered how proud little me would be to see 20-year-old me doing something like this. I have to remember that I'm not doing this for present me, or even future me, necessarily. I'm doing this for 5-year-old me dressing up as Diego in my animal rescuer outfit. I'm doing this for the little girl who wanted nothing more than to dedicate her life to saving animals.

May 19th, 2025: Day 1

Today started off as a tour, shadowing the Public Relations Director, Austin. The people going on the tour were donors of the sanctuary, so I believe they had been there before. I did not really contribute much to the informational aspect of the tour, as this was my first day, and I

didn't really feel like I knew much about the place. However, I got to listen to Austin's wealth of knowledge about the sanctuary and the animals all along the walkway. It was very overwhelming, and I was very impressed with Austin's depth and breadth of knowledge. I can only imagine how much effort it takes to know so much about so many animals, especially to that level of detail. I'm confident that I will learn a lot about each of the animals, but it would take me way longer than a month-long internship to get to the point where Austin is. I enjoyed getting the tour myself, and I asked a few questions. However, I did not want to dominate the tour, as the tour was not really for me.

After the tour, I started working on the walkway in Zone 1. Zone 1 is the farthest zone away from the welcome center, so it is quite a trek. The people who made it all the way out there were a little bit tired and didn't have as many questions as I was hoping they would, but it was meaningful. The very end of the walkway is a snack bar, but right before that is what they call the Tiger Roundhouse. The Tiger Roundhouse is deceiving, because you first see it and you think that they are just very small habitats. You wonder what the point of a sanctuary is because it looks just like cages. But then, you learn that these are actually just transitional habitats. If you were to take a tiger from being locked in a tiny little concrete cage and then all the sudden put it out on a 50 acre habitat, it would have no idea what to do, and it would be very stressed. So, these transition habitats that are small but with natural ground and tigers next door gives the tigers an opportunity to acclimate to their new environment before they are thrown into a large habitat. That is not something I'd ever thought about before. It reminded me a lot of introducing house cats to each other when you first get a new cat, and how you need to have them meet each other through the door and sniff each other before they can actually be in the same room.

I also learned about tigers' social behaviors and how, even though tigers are normally solitary, they can live in groups in captivity. It all has to do with individual tigers' temperaments and how willing they are to get along with others. I had assumed that there would be a lot of territoriality and fighting over food and habitat, but there actually isn't because the tigers know that they have a plethora of food. Once they get used to the sanctuary, they know that they have a reliable food source, so they don't have the same territoriality as wild tigers. After all, none of the tigers at the sanctuary have ever lived in the wild. They don't know about food scarcity or hunting in the wild anyway. I also learned that the grounds are home to many different farm animals in addition to large carnivores. This was a surprising fact to me, as you never think of the wild animal sanctuary as a farm sanctuary. Despite this, there are horses, water buffalo, cows, wallabies, kangaroos, among many others. I realized that the walkway really can't show you everything. There are so many habitats that are not visible at all from the bridge. That's why having binoculars up on the walkway can be so important.

The vast majority of the information I learned today came from one of the other volunteers, Keith. He served as my mentor through the afternoon. He has been a volunteer at the sanctuary for 14 years, and he has a wealth of knowledge. I enjoyed asking him every question that came to mind. When I approached my first guests to ask them if they had any questions, I felt confident because I had heard Keith's stories over and over again. My first few guest interactions went exceedingly well because of what I had just learned from Keith. I asked Keith if he ever got tired of saying the same things over and over again, as people tend to ask the same questions in particular areas. He said he does every once in a while, but for the most part, he

didn't get sick of it. He said it's because even though his answers are the same, people's reactions are always different, and their follow-up questions are always different as well. I thought that was a really great and optimistic way to look at it, instead of seeing it as tedious.

Overall, I feel far more confident today than I did on Friday. I feel as though I learned a lot about both the sanctuary and about the animals themselves, and I look forward to learning about new habitats and new animals with a new mentor tomorrow.

May 20th, 2025: Day 2

I had a lot of fun today! I was up on the walkway all day talking to guests. I spent the morning with a mentor, Dee. She was extremely knowledgeable, just like Keith yesterday. She had been a volunteer for many years, on top of being a frequent visitor before becoming a volunteer. She had a lot of insight, not only into the animals, but what I should say to guests in specific situations and when they ask specific questions. She prepared me very well for a lot of random, unexpected questions that I did end up getting today. We had a situation where two female lions were being introduced to a male lion, and that led to some conflict mitigation that had to be done. People were not supposed to walk by that habitat while the introduction was taking place, and there was the potential for people to become unhappy about that. Luckily, the whole process did not last too long. People were understanding during the whole process as well.

My favorite part of the day was when a school group came through. There were second, third, and fourth graders, and they had been fundraising all year long to have enough money to go on this field trip as a class. I thought that was such a sweet thing for them to do, and I really wanted to make sure that they felt as though they got their money's worth. I walked with them for a while, explaining different aspects of the habitats and telling them what certain animals were. They didn't ask as many questions as I thought they would, so I just started telling them things as I saw fit. I am far more familiar talking to kids about animals than adults, so escorting the kids along the walkway felt a little more comfortable. Plus, I knew that the information I shared with them was more likely to teach them something since they had less life experience.

In the afternoon, when the school group had left and I did not have a mentor anymore, I was forced to talk to pretty much only adults for the remainder of the day. This is really good for me, as I have not spent a lot of time educating adults. The time when I've done this is giving campus tours through the office of admissions, but that involves giving college-specific information instead of animal information. At times, I felt like I might be telling the adults things that were very obvious to them, but to my surprise, a lot of the adults really didn't know much about the animals at all. It was really cool to be able to educate people on my second day. It was good to know that I came into this internship with more knowledge than I thought. The general adult population did not know as much as I already did about the animals. It was not very busy at all in the afternoon, so I spent some of the time cleaning my zone that I was in. When a guest did go by, I made sure to give them a lot of my attention. As I was walking back to the Welcome Center at the end of my shift, I talked to this group of four young adults from Florida who had never visited an animal sanctuary before and had lots of questions that I could very confidently

answer. At the end of that conversation, they were very appreciative and grateful for my time and my expertise, and they asked questions about me specifically. It was really cool to know that they were genuinely interested and valued what I had to say. I feel as though I made the greatest impact on them today out of all the guests. It was really nice to have that reminder at the end of my shift of why I am doing this internship. I'm doing it for the animals, but you can't help animals if you don't have the support of the people. That's why the volunteers responsible for education are just as important as the animal care volunteers. I'm confident that tomorrow will be even more fulfilling than today was.

May 21st, 2025: Day 3

Every day keeps getting a little bit better than the last! I'm getting more used to the routine of it, so today went way faster than Tuesday or Monday did. I spent the entire day in Zone 7, which is the zone closest to the Welcome Center. I started the day cleaning bird poop off of railings and benches, which wasn't the most glamorous job, but certainly necessary. Soon, I met my mentor, Scott. He was very kind, just like my other mentors have been so far, and was quick to offer me a lot of valuable information that I didn't already know. I kind of dreaded working in the zones that didn't have a lot of lions or tigers, but I didn't particularly stay in my zone this time since the zone was smaller. But being in a zone that had more leopards and jaguars allowed me to learn more about big cats that I'm maybe not as comfortable with. The morning was fairly slow when it came to people, and I spent a lot of it following Scott around, hearing what he had to say about the sanctuary and the animals. I picked up on lots of little tidbits that I ended up using during the afternoon when I was up there by myself. Some of my interactions

today were fairly short, as people wanted to explore the sanctuary on their own terms and didn't really have any interest in hearing what I had to say. That was a hard pill to swallow. I had to realize that some people didn't go there to learn; they just went there to look at the animals. While this isn't necessarily a problem, it's hard to stop trying to educate people.

There were no school groups today, so I mostly interacted with older people. There were a few times when the group I was talking to asked me to just follow them along the walkway and sort of give them a tour. The only time I was able to oblige was at the very end when there was really no one else around. I was with these three older ladies for around an hour walking them down the walkway, explaining who the animals were and what their stories were, as well as general Sanctuary information. It was a really good test for me to see how much I knew and where my weaknesses lie. I really learned that my weaknesses lie in knowing the specific rescue stories of particular animals. I am pretty good when it comes to general sanctuary information and answering the most common questions. I also got a lot better today at knowing which habitats house specific species and how many of the animals there were in each one. But I noticed I lacked information on the rescue stories of specific animals, as well as telling the difference between two animals in a habitat that looked very similar. That is something I'm hoping to work on later this week. I will have another tour with Austin later in the week so that I can clarify information that I think I know, and hopefully, he'll be able to share some additional information as well. I am not yet able to look at the animal, especially from a distance, and know which particular individual it is. I hope to get to the level where I can see a lion, tiger, or bear from a hundred feet and know their name and story.

While I got a little bit tired of answering the same questions today, I think the questions will be slightly different when I am in front of different habitats. Next week, I look forward to working in animal care and possibly special projects as well. Scott told me a lot about building the habitats, digging, and designing different enrichment aspects, which sounds like a lot of fun to work on. I will have to speak with Courtney about getting involved in these other aspects of the sanctuary during my internship. I want to make sure that I have a very well-rounded experience.

May 22nd, 2025: Day 4

Every day is better than the last! Dee was my mentor again, and she certainly keeps the walkway entertaining. She is extremely knowledgeable after 14 years of volunteering at the sanctuary, and on top of that, she's very kind and fun to talk to. She has a lot of wisdom, both animal-oriented and not. I have learned a lot from her over the two days when she's been my mentor. It is very clear to me that she is passionate about the animals, and there's no ulterior motive for her service for the sanctuary. We were assigned Zone 3 today, which is pretty far down the walkway, closer to the Snack Bar at the very end of the walkway than to the Welcome Center at the beginning. This means that many people had already received the preliminary information from volunteers closer to the Welcome Center. However, guests still had plenty of questions about the animals and the functions of the sanctuary. It was slightly more difficult than the other zones, as I have the least amount of experience with Zones 2 and 3. Additionally, since the guests had already gotten most of their questions answered, the only questions remaining were more complex. This was a good reminder to me that I am still in my very first week of

interning, and I'm really not expected to know everything. I got several confidence boosts today, though, as I told people that it was only my fourth day at the sanctuary. Many people told me that they couldn't tell and that I was very knowledgeable. This was very encouraging for me to hear and only increased my confidence in future interactions.

A lot of being an education volunteer is being confident, approaching people, and faking it till you make it. You have to be able to acknowledge when you don't know the answer. That's never been something I've been good at, as I like knowing all the answers. This is a challenge for me to admit that I'm not sure. I'm learning that people don't judge you for not knowing, especially when they find out that you're a volunteer and that you've only been doing the job for a few days. People were extremely friendly today, and I felt as though I genuinely educated many people. My only qualm about today is that my feet are starting to hurt from standing and walking around for eight and a half hours every single day. I'm hoping that I will be able to rest a little bit over the weekend and/or get used to walking so much.

Today was far more focused on wolves than previous days. The only other experience I've had learning about the wolves has been the one morning tour I went on with Austin, the Public Relations Director, on my very first day. Since then, I really haven't heard much about the wolves. Today was quite the learning curve trying to memorize rescue stories, and I still don't think that I know them very well. I recognize that knowing the rescue stories of each animal is definitely my weak point, so I know what I need to focus on going into the future. Tomorrow, I believe I am in yet another zone practicing, so I'm excited to see which animals are in that zone that I'm not yet familiar with.

May 23rd, 2025: Day 5

Today, in the morning, I went on a tour with Austin down the whole walkway. I asked him many of the questions that I have acquired over the course of the week, and it was really good to hear answers that were official. I've been getting some mixed answers from the other volunteers, as they are not staff and they're not privy to some of the information that the full-time staff are. So, I felt like I was able to really trust everything he said. I overrode much of the information that I'd been told before, either because it was about the wrong animal or there was just a slightly different way that he wanted me to say things to the guests. I enjoyed learning more about the habitats that I did not know before, and disproving some misconceptions that I had in my head. I'm sure that I forgot many of the questions that I had come up with over the course of the week, but it just wasn't feasible for me to write them down every single time I came up with one. I know that as I come up with more, I will be able to text my volunteer coordinator or ask the other volunteers out on the walkway.

Later, out on the walkway, I was faced with a few more difficult questions than usual, which was really good for me. There were questions where I felt like there was a definite right and wrong way to answer. I feel as though I represented the sanctuary very well and incorporated all the things they would want me to say. I find that particular aspect very easy because I align very deeply with the morals of the sanctuary. It would be far more difficult if I disagreed with them on certain moral values or reasoning, but many of the sanctuary's values and missions I stand by very firmly and always have. In the afternoon, I was out in Zone 2 on my own. We had

a rush of guests at about 1:00 or 2:00 p.m., and then starting around 3:00 p.m., there was really no one new. This gave me an opportunity to read over the zone sheets more carefully and learn some of the rescue stories that I've struggled with in the past. I also talked more with several of the volunteers and feel as though I got to know them a bit better. I think having bonds with the other volunteers is really important, as they all have many years of volunteering and life experience that I could learn from.

May 26th, 2025: Day 6

Today, I learned just how much you can forget over a weekend. I stuffed so much information into my brain last week, and then I relaxed and went camping over the weekend. While I know I retained most of the information, it took me a little bit to get back in the groove of things. This really demonstrated the importance of repetition and time in the learning process. You can't become an expert about everything overnight, which is a very humbling experience for someone who always likes to be right. The sanctuary was, as I was expecting, busier than usual today. As it was Memorial Day, many people had the day off from work and could think of nothing better to do than go to the animal sanctuary.

The weather was perfect for the animals, especially in the morning. It only rained for about 5 minutes this morning, but the rest of the day was overcast and slightly chilly. So, all of the animals were out of their dens and walking around. Guests seemed very pleased with the number of animals they were seeing. This gave me an opportunity to remind them that the animals were out because of the weather. They were not out so that we could see them. A lot of

people come to the sanctuary with these preconceived notions about it, thinking that it is far more similar to a zoo than it really is. So, I think it's an important reminder that these animals do not do anything for humans; they are simply acting on instinct and what they want to do, which is what they should be doing. They should not need to accommodate people anymore. That's not only a good reminder for the guests, but it's a good reminder for me as well. We grew up watching shows like Tiger King, where the animals are there for the enjoyment of humans. We instinctively say that these animals are so cute, or we wish we could pet them, or we just want to cuddle them and take them home, and these are very typical human emotions that we're feeling towards these animals. But we have to remember that that's not what's best for the animals, and it's ultimately not what's best for us either.

The sanctuary has really opened my eyes to the selflessness that we must have in order to properly care for wildlife in captivity. Nothing we do for captive animals can benefit humans on purpose. It needs to be about the animals, or we're ultimately doing something very wrong. I was in Zone 4 today, which I've never done before. It houses the bobcat and lynx pair, the servals, and the lynx family. I did not feel very knowledgeable about these particular animals, but my mentor, Jill, helped me feel a little bit better about it. More than any other day, I received many questions that I wasn't quite sure how to answer. It was good for me to be able to say that I don't know, but to still offer them some sort of information that might satisfy them. Jill was very sweet and knowledgeable, having been a volunteer for nearly as long as some of my other mentors. I was very glad to have her company in the morning, and in the afternoon, when I was working by myself, I felt more confident because of the things she told me earlier in the day. Tomorrow, I am planning an activity for people to do while they're up on the walkway that I will actually get to

employ. I'm not really sure what tomorrow is going to look like, but I do know that I need to remember my laptop and my creativity!

May 27th, 2025: Day 7

Today, I expected to spend the entire day working on designing an educational activity. However, I spent the morning out on the walkway again, educating. This was slightly disappointing to me, as I had gotten my hopes up about planning an elaborate project, but I got to spend some time considering what project I wanted to do in between guests on the walkway instead. I came up with a few ideas, which is good because I will have to do a couple of other projects throughout the rest of my internship. The plan is that now, during my second week, I will carry out my first activity. Then, during my third week, I will come up with another activity. During my fourth week, I will have to have a third activity figured out. This will give me an opportunity to cater to all age groups over the course of my internship.

For this first one, I decided on the idea that I'd initially thought of when Courtney suggested I plan activities: Sanctuary Bingo (see Appendix C). The goal is that people walk around the sanctuary and do different tasks or see certain things. I was encouraged by Courtney to go above and beyond just talking about what animals are seen. So instead of a bunch of animals being listed on the bingo card, it's more experience-oriented. It's more along the lines of knowing specific animals' backstories, learning about the captive wildlife crisis, and speaking with volunteers. I wanted it to involve interacting directly with staff members and educational materials that are already out. I've noticed that a lot of people tend to ignore the audio kiosks and

the signs, not to mention the volunteers as well. I'm really hoping that this activity encourages people to interact with all of the different educational resources that we already have available to them.

I spent the afternoon in the volunteer office working on this activity. Through Canva, I designed the bingo card, the Certificate of Completion for folks who got a bingo, and some instructions and rules. I also decided that I should make the activity more age-friendly, so I added in a virtual option for folks who would rather do that as opposed to carrying around a laminated piece of paper. I really enjoyed working in Canva, as I always do. Courtney seemed impressed with the work I had done, and I really think it will add to the experience for guests. Tomorrow, I'm doing my first shift in animal care. I am really looking forward to going behind the scenes a little more and seeing how feeding is actually done. I also look forward to doing the ride-alongs and feeding the animals alongside staff.

May 28th, 2025: Day 8

Thinking back on it, today went just about as good as I could possibly have hoped. I was really nervous about working a lot with raw meat, as I don't have a lot of experience with it. I haven't cooked a lot using raw meat, and this is my first and maybe only shift in the Carnivore Nutrition Center (CNC). Luckily, I spent the morning and part of the afternoon dealing with bear food instead. Apparently, the bears don't eat raw meat per se. They actually eat produce, bakery items, cooked meat, raw fish, and pretty much anything else that humans eat (besides bacon). I never did learn why bears can't eat bacon, so maybe that's a question I'll ask in the future.

Besides the bacon, I realized that bears really aren't that picky when it comes to what they eat. You can throw a million different foods in a barrel together, and they will be happy. Maybe that makes them more picky, however, because they do enjoy such a wide variety and would not be as satisfied if they only had one type of food item. I wonder why bears are able to handle foods such as cooked meat, fish, bakery items, and other human foods, but cats and canines are not able to handle those things. I wonder at what point they diverged evolutionarily so that bears could handle it, but cats and canines couldn't.

I spent the day with Jen, a volunteer who has been working there for 2 years. Despite being at the sanctuary for significantly less time than the other mentors I've had so far, she was extremely knowledgeable about everything. We started off the day by sorting baked goods. There were items such as cakes, cupcakes, cookies, breads, pies, and anything you could possibly think of in the bakery section of your local Walmart. These foods were mostly expired, but there were some that had not yet reached their expiration date. A lot of the foods had broken packaging and had clearance stickers on them, indicating that no one at the stores had wanted them. I think it is really cool that we aren't wasting all of this food, and we're instead giving it to the bears. Jen also told me that when the bears are in hibernation, the sanctuary still receives all of this food, but can't use it. I wish there was a better way for the Carnivore Nutrition Center to be able to save this food for when the bears need it. However, I think they receive more than they need already, so that's not necessarily needed.

I met several other people whom I did not previously know, which was really cool. Everyone I've met at the sanctuary, volunteer or staff, is extremely passionate about what they

do. Every time somebody would pull up or leave in a truck, I would be jealous that I wasn't getting to go out on a feed or water, or a special project. However, I held out hope. After Jen and I got back from lunch, we resumed working on bear food, but more with deli items instead. These were things like lunch meat, hot dogs, lobster dip, whole hams and turkeys, whole chickens, among many other things.

Eventually, someone came up to us and asked us to go with her to the Bolivian Lion House. The keeper explained that we needed to do some cleaning in there as well as feed the lions. I was very excited, as this is about the best possible scenario. Lions are my absolute favorite animal in the entire world, the Bolivian lion house is indoors, and it's raining outside, and I would hopefully get to see them up close. There were lots of safety procedures that we needed to follow, understandably so. But it was amazing to be so close to the animals and watch them safely. It was definitely a first for scooping lion poop, but I'm really glad I had that experience. I also got to put some of the meat blocks into the food containers, which means I have officially fed a lion! Some of the lions were let back into their habitats while we were dealing with other habitats, and I got to watch them eat their food. This was really cool as well, as all of them acted differently when presented with their food. Some of them were very enthusiastic about eating, and others decided to dig holes around the food bowl instead of actually eating anything.

I never realized up on the walkway, how different each animal looked from the others. Down on their level, I could see the lion's facial features, and I realized that they're really easy to tell apart when you're close up. They also looked a lot larger on the ground. We finished the day

by doing dishes and cleaning up the Carnivore Nutrition Center. I'm not sure if I want to do another animal care shift or not. I got really lucky today that I didn't have to work with raw meat, and that I got to feed and see the lions up close. I was expecting to be dealing with raw meat all day, and then to get to feed bears. Not that this wouldn't have been a cool experience also, but the combination of no raw meat and feeding the lions was just about the best combo I could have hoped for. The jury is still out on whether or not I will choose to do another animal care shift. I'm excited about my education activity tomorrow!

May 29th, 2025: Day 9

Today, I got to carry out my first educational activity! It went better than I thought it would in some ways and not as good as I thought it would go in a couple of other ways. I started off the morning by finishing preparing the activity. I had to laminate the worksheets for Sanctuary Bingo, and I had to gather all my materials. Courtney helped me a lot this morning with making sure I was fully prepared, which I really appreciated. I spent a while getting set up, and people were approaching to see what was going on while I was still setting up. So, I ended up giving out some bingo sheets before I was fully set up, which works just fine. A lot of the day was just sitting there waiting for people to come so I could talk to them about the sanctuary or the bingo activity, and then waiting for them to come back afterwards. Luckily, most people were willing to take a bingo sheet and participate. When people came back, they had varying degrees of completeness on the sheet. Many people completed the entire thing and were excited to show me some of the pictures they took to prove that they actually crossed off the bingo items. I really enjoyed seeing people's pictures of some of my favorite animals, since I'm not allowed to have or

take pictures myself. None of the volunteers are permitted to take pictures during their shifts, and though we were not told the exact reason why, I can only assume it is because we are privy to areas and information that the general public is not.

People seem like they interacted a lot more with different elements of the sanctuary than they would without the bingo sheet. I got really positive feedback, especially from the morning volunteers! They told me that they were getting far more questions than usual, which made me really happy. That was one of my main goals of the activity. I wanted to actually get people engaging with the volunteers as opposed to the volunteers having to approach the guests. One of the volunteers, Susan, told me that the morning was far more fun because of the bingo activity, and it seemed like people were engaged and learning a lot more than they would without it. So, even though there weren't a ton of people who actually participated, those who did seemed to get something out of it.

I would guess that around 50 people total participated, including parents of kids doing the activity and people accompanying people doing the activity. Hopefully, tomorrow is going to be more busy and I will have more of my bingo sheets out at once. Something I'm going to improve upon for tomorrow is finding a more efficient way of erasing the sheets and making sure they're ready for the next person. I made 50 sheets, so I didn't run out at all today, but if the sanctuary had been busier, that would have been more of a problem. I couldn't clean the sheets faster than people were bringing them back to me. That's because I had everybody drawing on the laminated sheets in Sharpie as opposed to Expo marker. We simply didn't have enough Expo markers. I asked Courtney for more Expo markers for tomorrow.

There was a lot of discretion on my part today, and I'm sure it'll be the same tomorrow. The first decision I had to make was if multiple people can work on the same sheet and then all come back and earn stuffed animals. I decided that they could, since I didn't make multiple versions of the sheet, and it wouldn't be fair any other way. I also needed to decide if I was going to give people stuffed animals if they only got five in a row, versus if they got a blackout, despite what the directions said. I gave most everyone the stuffed animals, except for if they told me they didn't do the bingo at all, which was only one person. I think that is a good policy to have, telling people that they'll only get stuffed animals if they get a blackout, but then giving it to them regardless. I want them to try really hard on it, but I don't want to disappoint people who did try. I found that I was really busy for a few minutes at a time, and then nobody would come by for half an hour. I think that's the way it is with these sorts of passive events. I look forward to tomorrow and the busyness I hope it brings!

May 30th, 2025: Day 10

Today did not feel particularly productive, but it went by fairly quickly. I was surprised when I came into the volunteer office to see that Courtney and Austin wanted me to go on Austin's tour this morning instead of starting my Sanctuary Bingo activity right off the bat. It was a tour with a group of CSU veterinary students, and so they thought I would be able to relate to them more. The tour itself was pretty good, as we were working with really cool headsets that allowed Austin to talk at a normal volume and still have all 24 people hear him. It was also really nice to get a refresher on some of the information that I'd forgotten. Every time I go on a tour

with him, he says things slightly differently or adds more information that I didn't know before. I think I learned a lot alongside the vet students. These students seemed very interested in the sanctuary, asking questions that no one else has asked before that I've heard. These were specific questions about certain medications I had never heard of, and even concerns about diseases passing from the sanctuary's animals to wild animals living around the sanctuary. That was also really nice, as it prepped me for those more difficult questions that people who already know a lot about sanctuaries, animals, or animal medicine would ask. Most of the people who visit here don't already have that animal background, but this was great, as I feel more prepared for harder questions. I didn't really talk to any of the students much, but that's okay. They did ask me a few questions.

The coolest part of the tour was when we went to the veterinary clinic, which I've never been to before. That's not a place that's open to the public, but it was available for this particular tour since it's for veterinary students. The students had lots of questions for the vet on staff, and she answered them very knowledgeably and eloquently. Though I didn't understand half of what they were talking about, as it was medical lingo, it was still really interesting to hear about. Once again, I feel like it helped me with questions I might get from people who are more versed in the medical field.

After lunch, I set up the bingo table again. Only two or three groups of people actually ended up taking a bingo card this afternoon; it was very uneventful. That made me very thankful that I didn't have to run the bingo table all day, as I'm afraid it would have been just as slow in the morning as well. So, I think going on that tour really saved me from some boredom today. I

think the bingo game is a great idea, but it just really doesn't work if there aren't enough people visiting the sanctuary. Courtney had me write up a paragraph reflecting on the experience with the activity, which I will attach below. My main qualm with this activity was just a lack of participation from people. I wish there was a way that I could bring more people to the sanctuary. But when your internship is only 4 weeks long, you feel a little bit powerless. So, I'm going to keep brainstorming. Obviously, the run that the sanctuary puts on at the beginning of June brings a lot of people, but what about the other 364 days of the year? I'm also participating in the outdoor festival this weekend, where the sanctuary will have a booth. Hopefully, that will spread the word to more people in and around Denver who haven't heard of the sanctuary before. Maybe doing the festival this weekend will result in more people visiting the sanctuary next week. But it's really hard on such short notice to do more outreach events. I may just need to focus on educating the people already here and less on trying to get more people here when I have such a short time period to be at this wonderful place.

Sanctuary Bingo Activity Reflection (sent to Courtney):

The Sanctuary Bingo activity went well overall! It inspired lots of small learning opportunities for folks as they made their way along the walkway. Feedback from both guests and fellow volunteers was positive regarding the activity. Guests informed me that they enjoyed having a "challenge" to complete as they went along the walkway. Volunteers told me that they were asked more questions than usual, with Susan even commenting that it helped her brush up on some knowledge and rescue stories. I knew that completing the entire Bingo sheet would not be easy, and guests agreed that it was difficult. However, I think decreasing the difficulty would

have defeated the purpose, as the game would have been less informative and the prize less rewarding. I would have loved it if more people were here to participate in the activity. Perhaps doing this project on a weekend (and being able to extend it into the evening) would result in greater participation. I'm not sure how to do this, especially given that I have two weeks remaining of my internship, but I would love to find a way to bring more people to the sanctuary. Hopefully, our outreach during the Outdoor Festival this weekend will bring in more people for next week! On my end, I would like to improve on consistency when giving directions to Bingo participants. I did not have a pitch rehearsed, but I think it would be clearer if I had practiced what I was going to say beforehand.

June 1st, 2025: Day 11

On Sunday, I helped the Sanctuary with the Outside Festival and took the day off on Monday in exchange. Downtown Denver was chaotic to get to the event, but after arriving and finding the booth, I felt much calmer. People were stopping by the sanctuary booth curiously, and one of the four of us working would answer their questions. I mostly listened to Courtney and Austin's answers and speeches for the first little bit, but after I felt confident that I could answer questions well, I stepped up and took the lead for some guests. People at the festival had very different questions from people visiting the sanctuary, which makes sense. But I was not as prepared to answer questions about the sanctuary's pricing, hours, or location, so I learned a lot of that from Courtney and Austin as they answered other people's questions before me. Many people seemed very interested in visiting the sanctuary who had never gone before, and there

were others that have been there countless times that were just so excited to see us there at the festival. Both kinds of interactions were wonderful.

It was not long before the whole day was cut short, however. A severe thunderstorm came in, causing the entire event to be temporarily shut down. We did not know it was temporary at the time, so we ended up taking all of our supplies to Courtney's car in the pouring rain. Though we were not there for the entire time, I still think we informed people well about the sanctuary and increased the number of people who will visit in the near future.

June 3rd, 2025: Day 12

Today offered a new experience for me, as I decided to take the afternoon and evening shift as opposed to the morning and afternoon shifts. I've been told all along that the sanctuary is much more active at night, both with visitors and just the animals being more active. So, I was excited for the opportunity to experience the sanctuary at a different time. I came in around noon and spent a little bit planning for an upcoming activity that I want to do. I brainstormed some ideas, which I will flesh out more tomorrow. My main idea is that people would get to build a miniature habitat. They would have a tray and some plastic animals, as well as lots of other materials, and they would be tasked with building a habitat suitable for that animal with the given materials. I'm thinking of doing this activity in the Lion House, as people generally stop there to rest along the walkway anyway. This seems like a great activity for a hot day where

parents might want to rest for a few minutes, and this gives kids a good activity to do while they're waiting.

I decided to set up bingo for the afternoon, and probably had about 10 people total involved in it today. Before today, I felt as though it hadn't gotten its full worth utilized, so I'm glad I decided to incorporate it into today. Though not very many people came by, those who did seem to enjoy it. I received positive feedback when people came back from the bingo game. While bingo was happening, I cleaned the tables and chairs near the entrance to the walkway. While cleaning bird poop isn't the most glamorous job, I think I learned from it today. I learned that if you want to be trusted in an organization, you have to prove that you're willing to do the dirty jobs too. No, cleaning bird poop doesn't utilize any of my educational or animal skills, but it does prove that I'm willing to do whatever it takes in this internship. I learned that it's not always about the fun and exciting jobs. The tables and chairs needed to be cleaned, and I took the initiative to do that even though I didn't necessarily have to. I plan to do more small tasks like this in the future, to prove myself, and because they just have to be done.

In the evening, during Wild Nights (between 4:30 pm and closing), I went down the walkway, headed towards Zone 1. I wasn't too surprised to see that the animals were extremely active. I saw BaBuVa, our strawberry tiger, who is not out very often. I saw Pearl, one of our white tigers, stalking a coyote through two layers of fencing. The wolves all started howling at one another, and the Lions formed a little lion choir in The Lion House. All of these events combined, happening as I was walking down the walkway, provided a really cool atmosphere. I totally understand why they call it Wild Nights now! The weirdest thing that happened on my

way down the walkway was when I saw and heard the electrical fencing malfunctioning or acting up in a bobcat habitat. The fence was making a loud noise and sparking along with the noise. I called the Welcome Center to let them know, so I'm hoping that whatever problem is happening is resolved soon. I'm glad that I was walking by when that happened, as there would have been no other witnesses. I'm hoping it's nothing serious.

I also met a very nice volunteer named Barbara who asked me lots of questions about the internship and my future, and validated me in what I want to do in the future. She, too, was a middleman between researchers and the general public, providing them with the information they needed. This seemed very similar to what I want to do, except I want mine to be specifically wildlife-oriented. Then, I got to participate in the walk back, where we are escorting all guests out of the sanctuary on a 45-minute-long walk from the very end of the walkway back to the Welcome Center. Another volunteer, Jodi, led the walk back and taught me about specific procedures that we must do along the way. If I ever work a Wild Nights shift again, I will know exactly what to do.

June 4th, 2025: Day 13

Today started off with some planning and research. Courtney expects me to come to her office tomorrow, knowing what project I want to do and the materials necessary to do it. So, I spent some of the morning researching and compiling a list of materials that I will need for my habitat-building activity. I decided on an activity where people will have bins of different materials and will be tasked with building a habitat for an animal of their choosing. I'm going to

write out animal cards with information about specific animals that we have from several main species, and then they will have something to base their habitats off of, and a specific animal they're building the habitat for. I want them to think about all the different aspects of a habitat, and come up with creative ways to represent that through scraps and recycled materials. My main concern with this activity is that it will be too involved and will take too long for people. They won't be interested in doing an activity that will take up this much of their time. That's why I want to do the activity in the Lion House, where people tend to take a break. My other concern is whether or not people will be able to take their habitats. If I'm providing them with plastic animals, then maybe they shouldn't take those because they are expensive. Maybe they take the other components of their habitat and leave the plastic animals for the next people to use.

The rest of the morning and the whole afternoon were spent out talking to guests. The morning was very slow, and no one was coming by, but by early afternoon, it was picking up a bit. I'm to the point where I'm either answering the questions with an answer I know or just confidently saying that I don't know. Either way, I've now had enough experience answering people's questions about the sanctuary specifically that I'm not nervous to say when I don't know. I can't know everything, even though I'm learning things every day.

It was perfect weather today, not too cold or too warm. However, it was sunny enough that some of the animals decided to stay in their shelters and dens. As a result, I got asked a lot of questions about the foxes that come out into one of the bear habitats when the bears are sleeping. I had to explain over and over that they were not our foxes; they are simply wild foxes who enjoy the free food and safety that the sanctuary habitats have to offer. I also realized that I need

to brush up on my knowledge about mountain lions. Being in Zone 1, where there are four or five mountain lions, I was asked questions about why their habitats are the way they are and their behavior in the wild. Despite doing a whole research project last semester on mountain lions, I didn't feel like I was super knowledgeable on the topic. My research project last semester was based more around human perceptions of pumas as opposed to puma behavior or habitat requirements specifically. So, I will need to do a little bit of research to feel prepared in that area.

June 5th, 2025: Day 14

This morning, I did a general zone assignment because we were short on volunteers. I was set up in the Lion House, which is one of my favorite spots to be an education volunteer. Lions have always been my favorite animal, so being around them is extremely cool. I also love telling people about the two ligers we have in there, because people are always so surprised to find out that they're not just lions. I get to talk about how female ligers are fertile and males are sterile, and how you can have "liligers" and "tiligers". Most people don't really know anything about these big cats, so I enjoy the element of blowing their minds.

The sanctuary was kind of busy today! That made the time pass a lot faster. There were a few groups of people who were really interested in hearing all about the history of the Lion House and about each lion individually. There was one little girl who insisted on knowing the name of every single lion in there, which was really cute and a good memory test for me. In the afternoon, I was working on planning my activity, the Habitat Design Challenge (see Appendix B). Courtney helped me out a lot with materials, placing an Amazon order with a lot of things

that I needed. I felt guilty having the sanctuary spend so much money on this project, but I know that they'll be able to use whatever materials are left over for different educational projects. Plus, if it didn't fit into their budget, they wouldn't have offered. If the project has the impact that I think it's going to make, then it will be extremely worth it.

I'm going to set up my habitat design challenge project at the Welcome Center, where we already have a bunch of tables set up, because things tend to fly away or fall through the cracks of the Lion House. We are working really hard to minimize the number of things that fall into habitats or below the walkway in general. It's become a bigger problem as people have started wearing their name tags more this summer. The plus side about using the Welcome Center is that people will be able to go up on the walkway, explore the whole sanctuary, and then come back and pick up their habitats later if they want. I'm really excited for this one! Courtney said she's actually done a similar activity when she worked at a zoo. She ran a camp where kids got to do a very similar activity with very similar materials. So I'm hoping she'll be able to give me some tips. Additionally, this encouraged me that I was on the right track when it came to coming up with activities for people to do.

I spent the last few hours of my shift creating animal sheets specific to the animals I want people to focus on. So for example, if somebody wanted to make a tiger habitat, they would take the tiger sheet with information about my two favorite tigers, Ella and Ray. The sheet explains Ella and Ray's background story and includes a couple of pictures of them. It's my hope that people will take specific facts about the individual animals and tailor the habitats towards those animals. Ella and Ray are dwarf tigers, so they have really short legs because they used to be

kept in very small cages. So whoever is building their habitat should consider the fact that they probably can't jump as high or climb as well due to this incident in their past. I also think this is a great opportunity for guests to learn more about the rescue stories. Many guests don't really listen to the audio kiosks and don't ask about the rescue stories when a volunteer is around, so I think this will encourage them to learn about these individual animals and the terrible things they went through before they came to the sanctuary.

This afternoon, I really enjoyed working in Canva. I used similar templates to the Sanctuary Bingo ones, but there were a lot of changes to be made. I feel confident about my designs, though, as Courtney even asked me if I had taken a class on Canva or graphic design because of how good they looked. I feel very lucky that my great-grandmother somehow passed her artistic eye on to me. I guarantee that me a couple of years ago would be ecstatic about the opportunity that I'm getting right now. This is my dream job. My dream job is to create educational materials, both online through Canva and with physical materials, and then pass on my knowledge to the general public and the next generation. That's exactly what I'm getting to do, with this project and with this internship in general. As much as I hate waking up at 6:30 in the morning, I have to realize where this internship is getting me in the long run. I'm going to look back on this experience and be eternally grateful.

June 6th, 2025: Day 15

Today, Courtney, Austin, and I spent the entire time setting up for the running festival tomorrow. I was really sad that I couldn't go, and still am. It looks like a ton of fun, and the

sanctuary will, for the first time since I've interned there, be extremely busy. That's what I've been hoping for the entire time, for the sanctuary to be busier and for me to have more people to talk to. So part of me is disappointed that I won't be able to make it. However, I did have a lot of fun helping set up. I got to see what it's going to be like, and I even got to see the course itself.

We started the day by setting up tables and chairs, then moved on to placing trash cans and caution tape. Then, we dealt with lots of moving tarps and speakers and plugging everything in. Pat Craig, the founder, was around for a while. It was almost like being in the presence of an A-list celebrity when he was around. I was trying to prove myself to him, and it made me nervous to know that he was watching me and knew who I was. Maybe a part of me is interested in working at the sanctuary after this internship and after I graduate from college, so I value his opinion because of that. But another part of me thinks I just value his opinion because I think what he's chosen to do with his life is incredible, and I will feel incredibly accomplished if I turn out to be half the person he is. He started the sanctuary when he was just 19 years old, rescuing a Jaguar and housing it on his family's 20-acre farm. If that's not insanely cool, I don't know what is. I look up to him a lot.

I also realized today how much I look up to Courtney and Austin and how important they've been throughout this whole journey so far. They have not only told me what I should be doing and led me to the right path, but they were kind and supportive, and motivating the entire time. They're very compassionate people who not only care that the job gets done, but that their employees or anybody working under them is happy, comfortable, and safe. I'm becoming increasingly sad that my internship ends in only 6 days.

The rest of the day was spent helping out wherever needed, but my favorite part came at the very end. We had to put out signs for the run all over the course. There were around 50 total, so we got to drive around and place them where they needed to go along the course. This wouldn't have been so cool anywhere else. But here, we got to be right next to the animals as we were doing this. We got to actually drive past them at ground level. This race is the only time during the year that people get to be at ground level, and I thought I was missing that by missing the race. But driving around and setting up the signs gave me the opportunity to do that since I won't be there tomorrow. At one point, there were two lionesses who decided to run alongside the truck for the full length of their habitat. It was absolutely incredible, especially because I swore I could see them smiling at us. It was the most convincing animal smile I have ever seen.

Every time I forget why I'm doing this internship, I just have to look at the animals. I have to see the animals running, jumping, climbing, and just being happy in their habitats. That's why we're all there. That's why the run is happening tomorrow. There were times today when I didn't feel particularly useful. I felt like there was so much information that I wasn't privy to, just because I haven't been there long enough, and I wasn't prepped beforehand on it, of course. But that was okay. I spent most of my time (the vast majority, actually) with staff, not volunteers. It was cool to be surrounded by 8 or 9 working adults with full-time jobs at the sanctuary, and they were treating me as their equal. It really made me feel like I belonged and that if I want a job there someday, it's completely attainable. I have my heart set on not being in Colorado, at least for a little while, since I grew up here. But it is very good to know that I've made a good impression at this place.

June 9th, 2025: Day 16

Today went by super fast! When I first arrived, I chatted with Austin about the audio kiosks where he wanted me to record the voice-overs. I was really excited to do this, as it's something I've been looking forward to for my entire internship. I feel like it really allows me to leave a mark on the sanctuary. I ended up voicing a transitional habitat and a special use habitat, and though I thought the voice-overs were going to be easy, they were not as easy as I thought. We kept having an issue with popping noises in the recording, and it took me a while to figure out why. I was in my car alone, recording, so it was a bit intimidating, as Austin wasn't there to tell me what I was doing right or wrong. I figured out that I needed to bring the phone significantly farther away from my mouth than I initially thought. I had to practice each of the recordings a few times before I got to the final draft, but that was okay. I feel like I sounded positive, upbeat, and clear throughout the recordings. Since Austin had already written the prompts for me, there wasn't a lot of thinking to it either, which was nice.

After finishing up the recordings, I ran into my favorite mentor, Dee. I chatted with her about how sad she was that I was already leaving the sanctuary. She mentioned how she would not be here again before I leave, and I knew that I needed to express my gratitude somehow. For a little bit of background, Courtney sends out newsletters about the sanctuary every week to all of the volunteers. A section of the newsletter every month talks about the winners of something called Paws to Share, which is like a nomination system among all of the volunteers. You can write a Paws to Share for another volunteer or staff member whom you appreciate for something,

and the person with the most nominations wins for the month. I somehow ended up winning this for the month of May. Attached to my little winner announcement was a blurb written by Dee. I will attach it below. That nomination, along with her amazing mentorship, made me want to surprise her with something. Knowing that I had some free time this morning in my schedule, I drove to a few gas stations near the sanctuary in search of flowers for her. However, all I was able to come up with was a dreamcatcher and a chocolate bar. When I was up on the walkway later fixing the audio kiosks, I gave those items to her. She was very grateful, and we exchanged contact information, but I was still disappointed I couldn't give her flowers. She quickly eased my mind by saying the flowers were temporary, but the keychain dreamcatcher thing was forever, so it actually meant more to her.

During the remainder of the morning, I ended up fixing all of the audio kiosks by unscrewing the two screws, pressing the reset button, and replacing them. This gave me an opportunity to talk to some guests if I was feeling up to it, but I also didn't have to since I was busy doing something else. I did this all the way to the end of the walkway for all 18 audio kiosks and then came all the way back.

After lunch, I worked on my Habitat Design Challenge activity. I set everything up as if I were going to do the activity, and it took a long time to unpackage and prepare everything. By the time I had done all of the unpacking and setting up, it was time to pack everything up once again to go home. I'm hoping to have more time to do this project tomorrow since I didn't have time for a single person to build a habitat yet. I think that I have plenty of materials and

directions available for people, so I'm just excited to actually follow through with all of the plans and the preparation I've been doing for the last few days for this project.

Excerpt from Paws to Share newsletter on June 8th, 2025:

Paws To Share:

Thank you to everyone who submitted Paws to Share shout-outs last month! Another month has come to an end, and it's time to announce our winners for the month of May! Our volunteer winner is our Education Intern, Aubrey Spencer!

"I had the pleasure of being Aubrey's mentor on her second education shift. Not only was she friendly, professional, confident and a quick study but she was a natural problem solver. She would automatically see something that needed done and just do it. That might be cleaning or stepping in to talk to volunteers when my still-congested voice started fading.

At one point we had a large group of 3rd and 4th graders show up in the Lion House. The students were a bit rowdy. Almost at the same time we came to the same realization, that we needed a volunteer to stay with the group. Aubrey quickly volunteered to be that person, based on her experience working with that age group, her personality and self-confidence. As I was recovering from a cold, I was pleased and relieved to have Aubrey be the point person.

It was a blessing to work with Aubrey that day. She is an excellent asset for TWAS."

Thank you for everything, Aubrey!

June 10th, 2025: Day 17

Today was pretty boring, mostly because the sanctuary wasn't very busy. Tuesdays are always the slowest days. It took me a really long time to get everything set up for my two projects though, so that took up a good portion of the morning. I set up the Habitat Design Challenge materials, which took up two and a half tables' worth of space by themselves. Then, I decided to throw in Sanctuary Bingo and do that at the same time.

As people were coming by, they didn't understand what was happening, so I had to explain both projects to them. I told them they could choose one, both, or neither. Everybody except for one guy chose either neither or bingo, without the Habitat Design Challenge. Only one guy the entire day actually did the Habitat Design Challenge, but I was very grateful for him. He decided to design a habitat for our leopards, using our sky bridge habitat element that we have out there. It was really cool when he was done! And it took him a long time, so he did a really good job with it. Despite having the plastic animals, rescue stories, craft materials, and everything else you could think of, including good signage, nobody else had any interest in doing that project. I don't know what I'm doing on Thursday, but maybe it will involve that project again, so we can give people another chance to do something fun and build a habitat.

Throughout the day, many people played sanctuary bingo, though. They seem to really enjoy the interactive element of the sanctuary, and came back saying they had a lot of fun. I gave out a lot of stuffed animals, even when people didn't necessarily get a blackout, just to be nice and to encourage people to come back to the sanctuary. I'm hoping that Thursday is going to be more busy, whatever I end up doing.

June 11th, 2025: Day 18

Today, I was doing my second Animal Care shift! I was a little nervous going into today again because I didn't really want to work with raw meat. However, the reason I chose to do Animal Care again is because I wanted to push myself out of my comfort zone a little bit. When I showed up, I found out that I would be working with long-time volunteer Henry. Henry is very nice and funny, so he definitely kept the day interesting. We luckily ended up focusing on bear food again today. After less than an hour of preparing bear food, I was approached by two keepers who said they were going out to feed the bears. So, I did get to go with them!

We probably fed in about five different habitats, and it was really cool seeing their procedures. I learned about regulations and how they had to have double fences in addition to having hot wires. I also learned about their procedure for keeping their trucks shifted in drive just in case anything happens, and how someone must always stay in the car when someone else is on the ground. I didn't get out of the car at all, since that is not allowed for volunteers or interns, but it was still really cool to watch everything. The best part overall was being able to be in the bear habitat without a fence between me and the bears. Of course, there was a whole truck in between

us because I was in the truck, but it was very cool nonetheless. Similarly to when I went to the Lion House, it was interesting to see their facial features and to see how they really look very different up close, even when they look similar from a distance. I learned a little bit more about their schedule for feeding the bears and how they decide who to feed, as the bears do not get fed every day nor is it at the same time when they do get fed. They have to design a master schedule behind the scenes and stick to it, but the bears can't predict it.

After I got back from bear feeding, I began preparing more bear food. There was quite an assortment of bakery items and deli items today, and sometimes the big box stores had put all of it into the same barrels, so there was some intricate sorting to be done. Some of the food was just in frozen chunks and wasn't packaged at all, so it was really hard to get apart. It was interesting to see the variety of food that we get, particularly for the bears. There was everything from bakery items to shrimp, all the way to sour watermelon-flavored popcorn. The best part is that the bears enjoy all of it. They really are omnivorous and flexible.

After eating lunch at the snack bar with Henry, we came back and did more of the same. While the tasks are repetitive, it really isn't boring at all. You have someone to talk to, and you really have to be paying attention to where you're putting everything. If you have a barrel for trash, a barrel for bakery items, and a barrel for deli items, in addition to the barrel you're getting the food from, you really have to pay attention to what you're doing. It's very easy to put meat into the bakery barrels or to accidentally get trash into any of the food barrels. This could be detrimental to the bear's health, as everything is very calculated and individualized.

To end the day, we did some cleaning around the Carnivore Nutrition Center. This included sweeping, vacuuming, scrubbing, sanitizing, and washing dishes. It's amazing how much cleanup goes into each and every day at the CNC. I definitely don't think I would love a job there at the nutrition center long-term, partially because I have to shower the moment I get home due to being covered in raw meat and fish from cleaning and sorting. However, it is a great learning experience, and I'm really glad that I got the hands-on animal care experience that I can now learn from and provide on my resume to future employers. Plus, it is a special, novel experience that I will always remember.

June 12th, 2025: Day 20, Last Day

Today, Courtney gave me the option of doing a general walkway assignment or doing one of the activities I have planned over the course of the internship (either the sanctuary bingo or the Habitat Design Challenge). After mulling it over, I decided to go with the general walkway assignment. I figured that the more time I can spend out on the walkway while it is still free to me, the better. I know that in a month, after this has all been said and done for a while, I am going to miss the opportunity to spend time with these animals. So, I was all set up in Zone 3 for the morning. While it started off really slow, it soon became fairly busy! There were a couple of summer camp groups going through, which really added to the mass of people coming down the walkway. Though the school groups were not really the ones with many questions. Most of the questions, as usual, came from older people without kids. It is always nice to talk to people who are not in a hurry, as they ask a lot of questions and stay interested in what I have to say. I can

also tell that they are there FOR the animals instead of just wanting to SEE animals, which makes a huge difference in the quality of the interaction.

After lunch, Courtney wanted me in Zone 7, closest to the Welcome Center. I spent the first part of the afternoon writing cards for Courtney and Austin, thanking them for their support, guidance, and mentorship throughout my internship. Courtney was nice enough to put together a thank-you gift for me as well, which I really appreciated. I can't believe this experience is already over. I remember my first day like it was yesterday, and many of the days in between are a blur. During the first week, each day seemed to take forever to go by, and now each one goes by in a flash. I know it's because I have gotten used to the routine of it, and I have become comfortable here. Once something is no longer a novel experience, it goes by far more quickly than it should. In some ways, I am very grateful that it is over. I'm not used to waking up this early and then immediately driving for an hour on the highway to get somewhere. I am also not used to being away from my boyfriend for a week at a time, for weeks in a row. In addition, I have been living with my grandparents this whole time, which is a huge switch from my housing during the school year. Everything shifted so quickly at the end of the semester, and I immediately had to adapt to this schedule the Monday after finals week. Now, after today, I will be able to breathe again and take a break. I look forward to spending more time with family, sleeping in, and doing summer activities.

On the other hand, I am sad that the internship is over so quickly. In my dreams, I feel like there were so many other things I was wanting to do. I wish I could have planned more activities, talked to more guests, and fed more animals. But all of that can only come with time.

And I know this is not the last opportunity I will have to work with animals or to educate others about them, because that is what I want to do for the rest of my life. This is just the beginning of my journey helping animals and teaching others to help animals. I will be forever grateful to The Wild Animal Sanctuary for the opportunity to begin my journey as an animal educator.

Conclusion

My Thoughts and My Future

Some of my previous experiences with captive wildlife education impacted my way of thinking upon beginning this internship experience. For my Biological Diversity class last semester, I did a research project comparing and contrasting two Colorado zoos based on their animal enrichment techniques. After visiting both zoos, researching, and analyzing photos, I drew some interesting conclusions. I observed that the Denver Zoo Conservation Alliance had an emphasis on animal choice. Meaning, during animal demonstrations, keepers always emphasized the fact that the show would not happen if the participating animals were not in the mood to be seen. On the other hand, I observed that the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo had an emphasis on human-wildlife interactions, as was demonstrated by the giraffe feeding station and the tortoise wandering around the visitor walkways. While my initial thought was that the Cheyenne Mountain Zoo's method was worse, I also realized that the tortoise and the giraffes had that freedom of choice, too. If the tortoise did not want to be out amongst the humans, it could go back into its enclosure. Similarly, if the giraffes did not wish to be fed by visitors, they could retreat farther back into their enclosure, where there were alternate food sources. It was during this research project that I fully realized how nuanced captive animal care is. Several aspects of both of these zoos warranted some criticism. In fact, I would say I had more concerned moments than not. The same cannot be said for my experience at The Wild Animal Sanctuary.

Despite the zoos I researched and the sanctuary all being captive wildlife facilities, I truly do not think they could be more different. I believe the biggest difference is where the animals came from. Animals at the sanctuary did not come from the wild. In fact, none of them would

have survived had they been released into the wild. This is not true for many animals at zoos. Over 90% of mammals and 70% of birds in zoos were bred in captivity (National Research Council 2005). While zoos have a focus on overall species conservation through captive breeding programs, the sanctuary was focused on the individual and the mistreatment that each specific animal went through (Ballantyne et. al., 2007).

I do believe there is a place for both. Captive breeding programs are a huge reason why we have some species, and zoos overall are the reason why many people love animals (Spooner et al., 2021). In fact, I'm not sure I would care for animals at all if it weren't for zoos. But for me, undeniably, the animal sanctuary felt like my type of place. I think everyone who visits there can feel it. This feeling of selflessness, sympathy, and almost servitude fills the air. It is as if everyone working, volunteering, and visiting the sanctuary is saying, "I'm sorry. Even though it was not me directly who hurt you, I am so sorry." I have never experienced this feeling at a zoo, and it is this feeling that has caused me to switch gears completely. This proves the importance of a strong emotional connection for facilitating people's actions (Ballantyne et. al., 2007).

I have been saying for a few years that I want to work at a zoo, and I can officially say that dream is no more. I no longer wish to be associated with the connotations of the word "zoo", a place where there are animals that could survive in the wild and are not actively saving their species. While I believe these places need to exist, I find my peace in sanctuaries. My "new" dream, influenced by many different factors in my life, is to be a business owner with a sanctuary of my own. I want a big piece of land in the middle of nowhere, but I want people to visit and learn about my cause. Maybe I will stick to farm/domesticated animals, or maybe I will expand

my reach outside of that. I have many fundraising ideas for this sanctuary that involve my other interests outside of animals, but I have a feeling it will all lead back to them, no matter what. My life always has.

I laugh at myself because I have truly come full circle. In 7th grade, I wrote an essay entitled “Dream Job” (see Appendix A) in which I wrote about wanting to open my own animal sanctuary to save individual animals and educate others about the importance of saving animals too. Reading it back just now, I was shocked at the parallels between my thinking then and my thinking now. I knew, even then, the way I felt at sanctuaries versus zoos, and where my passions lay. For some reason, the past eight years caused me to forget. I spent some time thinking about working at a zoo, doing wildlife journalism, photography, grant writing, and even environmental law. This summer, The Wild Animal Sanctuary brought me back to the dreams of 12-year-old me. For that reason, I have attached the essay below. I hope that it provides context to my current beliefs and that it proves that this thesis, this culmination of knowledge and dreams, did not simply take place this summer; this thesis has been a lifetime coming.

What I Left Behind

The most important service I provided for the sanctuary was talking to guests and answering their questions. I was able to storytell and establish an emotional connection with them during one-on-one conversations (Ballantyne et. al., 2007). This gave me the opportunity to practice my authentic leadership, where I was able to express my own thoughts and opinions to establish trust between guests and myself. I also had to adapt my answers and stories depending on who I was speaking with, which became easier as the internship went on. I soon learned to keep stories more positive around kids, knowing I could share more details with adults. I would not have been able to adapt my responses to my audience had I been speaking to a whole room of people at once. As it turned out, speaking to guests one at a time facilitated learning far better than if I had presented information in front of hundreds of people at once.

Not everything I left at the sanctuary was nonphysical. The educational materials I created over the course of the internship (Sanctuary Bingo and Habitat Design Challenge) have plenty of materials leftover for future volunteers and interns to incorporate into their educational endeavors. Whether they choose to copy the exact same activities or change them, I hope that what I designed inspired future educational methods.

What I Took Away

1) Empathy is more important than entertainment.

Establishing empathy can be far more impactful than entertainment when it comes to wildlife education. While some zoos I have experienced rely heavily on shows, demonstrations, and background music, the sanctuary relies on nothing but the animals and their inspiring stories. The

zoos kept my attention for a while, but my heart was changed forever by the animals I had the privilege of educating about at the sanctuary.

2) One individual can be more impactful than thousands.

I've heard lots of statistics about the number of individuals of a species existing in the wild. Of course, if the number is low, I am emotionally impacted. I have never been more emotionally impacted, however, than hearing the story about one individual animal who experienced countless hardships only to end up at the sanctuary experiencing freedom for the first time.

3) I am allowed to change my mind.

Where I once had a burning passion for zoos and their mission, I now see The Wild Animal Sanctuary as peak captive wildlife care and education. That being said, it is likely that my mind will change again. I have come to realize that if my opinions were not ever-changing, I would no longer be growing and learning myself.

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Appendix A

Dream Job Essay

Dream Job Essay

Aubrey Spencer
English 7
Mr. Carney
30 August 2017

My dream is to save many kinds of animals from all around the world by opening my own animal sanctuary. During my career of running my animal sanctuary, I will rescue animals and bring them to safety, I will learn about their behavior, and I will educate the public on the importance of caring for them. It's always been a hobby of mine to learn about all kinds of animals, whether that's through books, television, or having actual encounters with animals. My grandma fosters kittens, and every weekend, I go over to her house and help her take care of them. Sometimes, we go to adoption events and bring our kittens that are ready to find their forever home. Over the years, I have learned a lot about kittens. I've learned about how to care for them, whether they're 2 days old or 5 months old, and I've learned about various illnesses that they've had, and how to treat them. I believe that this gives me a head start when entering this career. Also, I strongly believe in animal rights, and I'm always on the side of animals. If there is ever anything I can do to help make their lives better, I will. That's why I believe this is the perfect job for me.

I will be able to save animals on a large and small scale, meaning I can help whole species as well as individuals. I plan to take in animals that may not survive in the wild, such as when they are abandoned or injured to the point where they can't take care of themselves. Another reason that animals may stay at my sanctuary is because they may have come from inhumane situations, such as a circus or a zoo that treated them in a way that affected their mental or emotional health. One of the goals of my sanctuary will be to stop the mistreatment of animals by taking them away from the place and the people that were treating them badly, and then proceeding to transport them to my sanctuary, where they will then lead a happy and healthy life, free of abuse.

There is so much that we can learn from animals just by observing them. As my grandma has said, "It is such a joy to see a sick or feral kitten thrive and become the sweet animal that we know they can be." I want to find a way to prove that animals deserve to be treated with respect and kindness. I want to learn about their inner feelings, and why they do some of the things they do. Wouldn't it be nice to know how some animals can sense earthquakes? Studying the way they react from the way we interact with wildlife could give us a better understanding of how some of them think, and how their minds work. The better we understand them, the better we'll be able to fit their needs when it comes to housing them. In short, learning about wildlife may help us figure out how to give them have a better life. We may find out that a certain individual requires some sort of special care that we may not usually give to other individuals of the same species, but yet it is vital to their wellbeing. Like, for example, a foster kitten may have an eye infection and they need medicine, but we wouldn't have noticed if we hadn't been paying attention and checking on the kittens regularly. I believe that there is so much that we can learn by just observing them, and not only for the benefit of them, but the benefit of us too.

"If we can teach people about wildlife, they will be touched. Share my wildlife with me. Because humans want to save things that they love."(Irwin) Educating the public about the importance of animal caretaking is another objective that I plan to attain. Just because I want to do this doesn't mean it will happen. This is because I can't do it alone. In order to make any of this happen, I will need the help from others, who, like me, care enough to dedicate hours of their time, every day, to this cause. There is only one way that I can do it. I need to convince people that this is a battle worth fighting. I need to first show people what has happened to make any of this necessary in the first place. The animals have to look desirable, meaning that people need to be taught just how similar people and animals are, and that they are worth saving. Then, after people realize that there is a problem, I will show them the solution, and give everyone an opportunity to help in some way, whether that's by simply donating to the sanctuary or physically being there and working there. Spreading a love for animals will hopefully encourage animal caretaking as a desired profession for others.

Appendix B

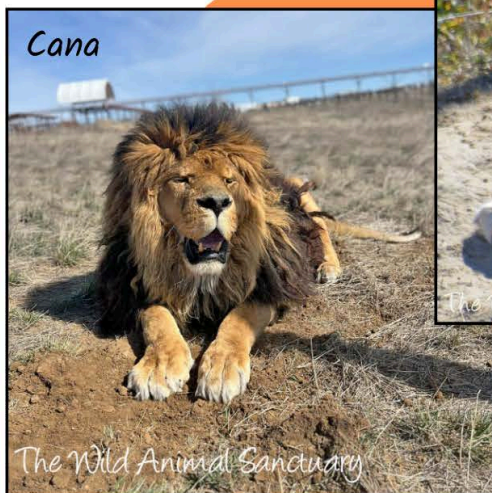
These animal sheets were designed by me to be used during the Habitat Design Challenge activity. Description portions of the animal sheets were written by sanctuary founder, Pat Craig.



Ella and Ray: Anonymous Surrender – Orange female Tiger (Ella) and White male Tiger, (Ray) are two siblings that came to the Sanctuary by unprecedented means. In Summer 2023, their previous owners mysteriously dropped off the frightened young cubs in two pet carriers in the Sanctuary parking lot – then drove away! Possibly illegally brought to the States from Mexico, the privately-owned cubs were suffering greatly from Metabolic Bone Disease and other physical impairments. Upon arrival, neither could walk or even straighten their bodies. However, after ‘round-the-clock, life-saving treatments from the Sanctuary’s medical team, these two Tigers made a miraculous recovery! Though the malnutrition and genetic defects have left their bodies stunted, they eventually graduated to an expansive habitat where they can run, swim, climb, and rest to their hearts’ content.



Lions: Tabitha & Cana

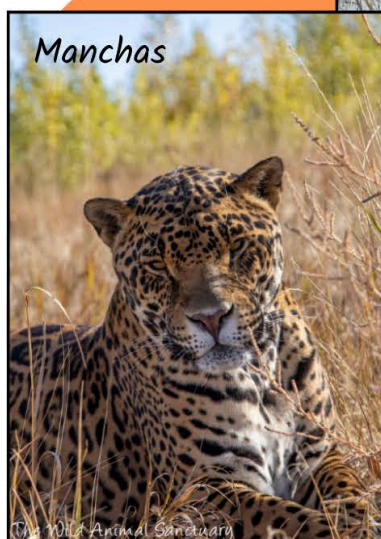


Tabitha: Private Forfeiture — A private owner near Dayton, Ohio was originally keeping a male Lion and female Lion in a horse trailer. An animal welfare agency convinced the owners to give the animals to TWAS, but when the female Lion became pregnant (no contraception had been enacted for either animal) and the inevitable set of cubs was born - three in all - the owners changed their minds and decided to keep all five Lions. The owners were immediately forced to step in and move the Lion family out of the horse trailer, to keep the babies from getting crushed by the adults in such cramped quarters. Over the next year, the animal welfare agency continued working tirelessly to get the Lions released, but the owners refused. Then another tragedy befell the Lion family...the adult male was electrocuted in a horrible accident. To make the situation even more dire, one of the cubs died from malnutrition and the other two cubs were in imminent danger of the same demise. With the fate of the remaining mother Lion and her two cubs hanging in the balance, the animal welfare agency who had been working on the case all along, made a final push to get the Lions released. The owners, at long last, agreed. For mom Lacie, and cubs Sampson and Tabitha, it was the best day of their lives! Since TWAS had long since agreed to take the animals, our rescue team went to Ohio in spring to, at long last, rescue the Lions.

Cana: Canadian Fish & Wildlife Confiscation — Male African Lion, Cana (pronounced Cane) was confiscated from a drug dealer by Canadian Wildlife Officials when he was only 6 weeks old. He was subsequently rescued, and brought to the Sanctuary where he could be raised with lots of love and eventually join one of the prides living in open habitats at the Sanctuary.



Jaguars: Manchas & Bagheera



Manchas: Mexico Government Confiscation - Manchas is a four year-old male Jaguar that was kept by private owners who purchased him as a cub and thought they would be able to keep him as their pet. Even though the family had proper permits to keep him, they didn't provide the attention and care that he needed. He was more or less left to be raised by the family's dogs, which caused him to be confused about his identity. Over time, due to the stress of being kept in such an unnatural environment he began self-mutilating. His owners finally realized he could not survive or function as a pet, so they gave him to a wildlife rescue organization that works on a regular basis with our Sanctuary. Manchas was kept at their facility until he was able to be transferred to Colorado - where he will now be able to live and thrive as a powerful and majestic male Jaguar in one of the Sanctuary's large acreage habitats.

Bagheera: Mexico Government Confiscation - Female Black Jaguar, Bagheera, along with female Orange Tiger, Sheerkan, were discovered and subsequently confiscated at a Mexico airport. Unfortunately, their troubles were far from over as they were then taken to a horrible zoo in Mexico. Both animals suffered malnourishment from an inadequate diet which resulted in severe malformations on Sheerkan and a forelimb fracture on Bagheera. Thankfully, the animals were surrendered to a wildlife rescue organization in Pachuca, Mexico that works on a regular basis with our Sanctuary. These two, along with nine other animals with their own respective rescue stories, were transferred to our Keenesburg facility in November 2024. After periods of acclimation, each animal has grown to relish their newly found (but long-deserved) peace, full diets, and expansive space!



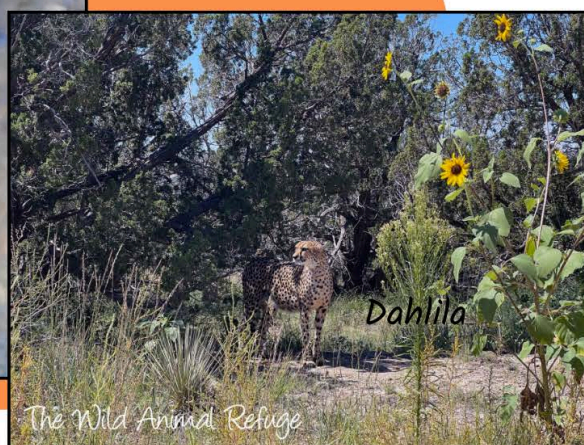
Mountain Lion: Pakal



Pakal: Mexican Wildlife Authorities Confiscation - Pakal is a male Mountain Lion that was sold to a private citizen in Mexico. He was taken to a veterinarian to get checked and was found to have metabolic bone disease (Rickets) due to poor nutrition. The owners refused treatment and took Pakal home, but he ended up scratching a small child and was sentenced to be killed. The veterinarian heard about his plight and helped protect Pakal until he was able to find a safer place for him to go. Working with our partners in Mexico, the Sanctuary was able to rescue Pakal and fly him to Colorado, where he now lives with other Mountain Lions in a large acreage natural habitat. With newfound freedom and specialized care, Pakal now has a wonderful new life at The Wild Animal Sanctuary.



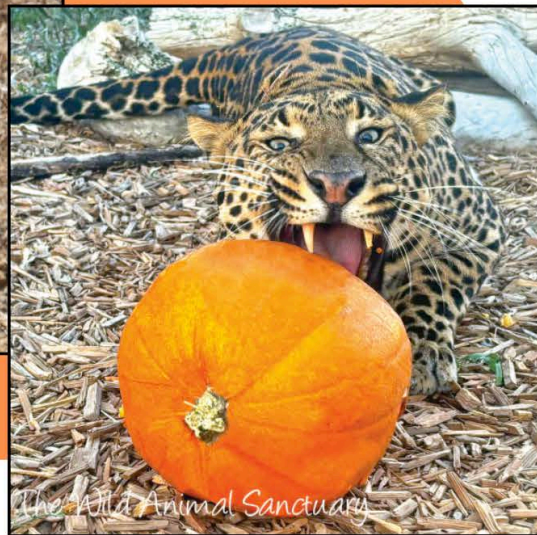
Cheetahs: Jaina & Dahlila



Jaina and Dahlila: AZA Species Survival Program Retirement - Female Cheetahs, Jaina and Dahlila, came to The Wild Animal Refuge upon being retired from the Species Survival Program (SSP). Born at the Fossil Rim Wildlife Center in Texas, they aided in the conservation of Cheetahs through selective SSP breeding and cub rearing at AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) accredited zoos, including the Caldwell Zoo, from which she retired in early 2021. Upon her retirement, the Sanctuary was asked about providing a lifelong home to these incredible animals, to which we readily and proudly agreed. Jaina and Dahlila now live in a specially designed, multi-acre habitat that allows plenty of room for her to run—or just to nap—whichever they prefer.



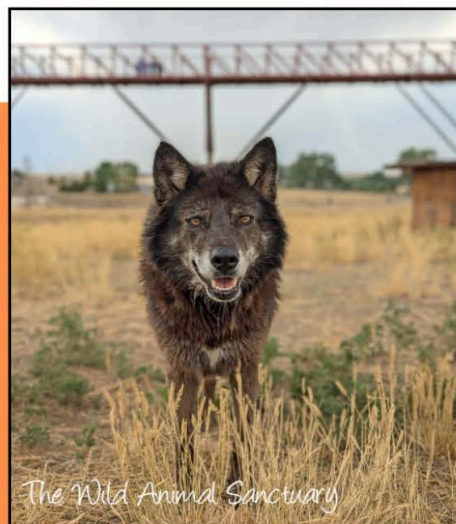
Leopard: Kiro



Kiro: Mexico Government Confiscation - Kiro is a male Leopard that was confiscated by the Mexican Government agency known as PROFEPA due to his being trafficked illegally. When rescued, Kiro was suffering from abuse and neglect including having been declawed on all four feet and being malnourished and underweight. Kiro is now at a healthy weight and has regained his agility and mental health. This handsome Leopard can look forward to living a wonderful life in a sensory-rich habitat with the Sanctuary's many other Leopards.



Wolf: Moon



Moon: Louisiana Fish & Game Confiscation - Moon is a female wolf that was kept as a pet by a family in Louisiana. Neighbors of this family called local authorities after seeing dead dogs on the property. Several dogs were found tied up outside with no food or water, some were barely clinging to life, some already passed away. Due to one of the surviving dogs being a pure wolf, The Wild Animal Sanctuary was contacted in order to rescue Moon and provide her with an appropriate home (along with Jacob a year earlier). Moon is now finally able to run, play and live with other wolves in a large natural setting.



Black Bear: Ricki



Ricki: Forced Private Forfeiture - Ricki is a female Black Bear that lived in a small concrete and steel cage outside of an ice cream shop located in Pennsylvania for more than 12 years. Ricki's cage was located next to a Putt-Putt golf course in order to attract more visitors to the ice cream shop. Visitors would watch Ricki pace back and forth all day and would buy dog food from vending machines to put down a PVC pipe that led to Ricki's cage. Private citizens, along with the Animal Legal Defense Fund, sued the owner and were able to reach a settlement where Ricki would be freed and come to the Sanctuary where she could then live and roam freely in a large acreage natural habitat.



Brown Bears: Natasha & tiny



Natasha



Tiny (he is not)



The Wild Animal Sanctuary

The Wild Animal Sanctuary

Natasha & Tiny: Texas Facility Closure – Natasha & Tiny were among 25 Bears that were rescued from a facility in Texas that was forced to close. The owner of the facility ran away and left no funding to feed or care for over 300 animals. With nowhere to go, TWAS and other facilities were called to the rescue to give all of the animals a second chance. These lucky Bears are now living together in a large acreage and enjoying their new freedom at TWAS.



Foxes: Pancakes & Pickles



Pancakes & Pickles: State Attorney Confiscation-- These two Red Foxes, along with two others, were four of hundreds of animals confiscated from a rural roadside zoo that had run afoul of state animal welfare laws due to animals living in horrific conditions and subject to neglect and abuse. When called in to assist, The Wild Animal Sanctuary rescued the four Foxes as well as 23 other animals. They had lived in a small concrete enclosure, but now live great lives together in a large, natural habitat where they will always be loved and cared for, and be able to live as naturally as possible with everything they could ever ask for.

Appendix C

Sanctuary Bingo

The following graphic is the Sanctuary Bingo sheet that I created to be used by guests during their sanctuary visit.



Appendix D

Photographs of My Time at the Sanctuary

All animal photos were taken by me on the last day of my internship (June 12th, 2025) after my final shift was completed. Rescue stories were obtained from the sanctuary website:

<https://www.wildanimalsanctuary.org/rescues>

Figure 1

Duke



Note. County Animal Control Confiscation - Duke is a male Tiger cub that was rescued from an illegal drug ring operating in Albuquerque, NM. He was discovered living in a dog crate at the tender age of 4-months after police responded to a shooting call and followed a trail of blood leading to a local trailer park. Duke had been obtained illegally and was kept as a pet by people who had no idea how to care for him. Now that Duke lives at our Sanctuary, he will be able to grow into a healthy and happy Tiger with proper nutrition and lots of love.

Figure 2

Female Black Leopard



Note. Rescue story not yet available.

Figure 3*Nakita*

Note. Owner Surrender – Female Serval, Nakita, was raised by a family in Nevada as a so-called pet—and perhaps with an eye towards using her for breeding purposes. Moving to Colorado and not wanting to run afoul of the state’s strict laws against keeping exotic animals, the family called and asked if The Wild Animal Sanctuary could provide a home for the young Serval. The Sanctuary was only too happy to offer a more appropriate, forever home to this beautiful cat who now enjoys lots of room, enrichment and shares her life with the Sanctuary’s many other Servals.

Figure 4*Black Bear**Note.* Name unknown.

Figure 5

Kimberly or Karen



Note. Private Forfeiture – Female White Tiger siblings, Kimberly and Karen, were brought to The Wild Animal Sanctuary’s care after being kept privately as pets in Texas. Thankfully, the owners chose to forfeit the animals as they grew. They were named by Heinz Simon, who donated funds for their care, after his daughters. These beautiful animals now enjoy their life relaxing in a large, natural habitat surrounded by Tiger neighbors. They especially love playing in their pool - regardless of the weather!

Figure 6*Lacie & Tabitha*

Note. Private Forfeiture —A private owner near Dayton, Ohio, was originally keeping a male Lion and female Lion in a horse trailer. An animal welfare agency convinced the owners to give the animals to TWAS, but when the female Lion became pregnant (no contraception had been enacted for either animal) and the inevitable set of cubs was born - three in all – the owners changed their minds and decided to keep all five Lions. The owners were immediately forced to step in and move the Lion family out of the horse trailer, to keep the babies from getting crushed by the adults in such cramped quarters. Over the next year, the animal welfare agency continued working tirelessly to get the Lions released, but the owners refused. Then another tragedy befell the Lion family...the adult male was electrocuted in a horrible accident. To make the situation even more dire, one of the cubs died from malnutrition, and the other two cubs were in imminent danger of the same demise. With the fate of the remaining mother Lion and her two cubs hanging in the balance, the animal welfare agency, who had been working on the case all along,

made a final push to get the Lions released. The owners, at long last, agreed. For mom Lacie, and cubs Sampson and Tabitha, it was the best day of their lives! Since TWAS had long since agreed to take the animals, our rescue team went to Ohio in spring to, at long last, rescue the Lions.

Figure 7

Bird Family



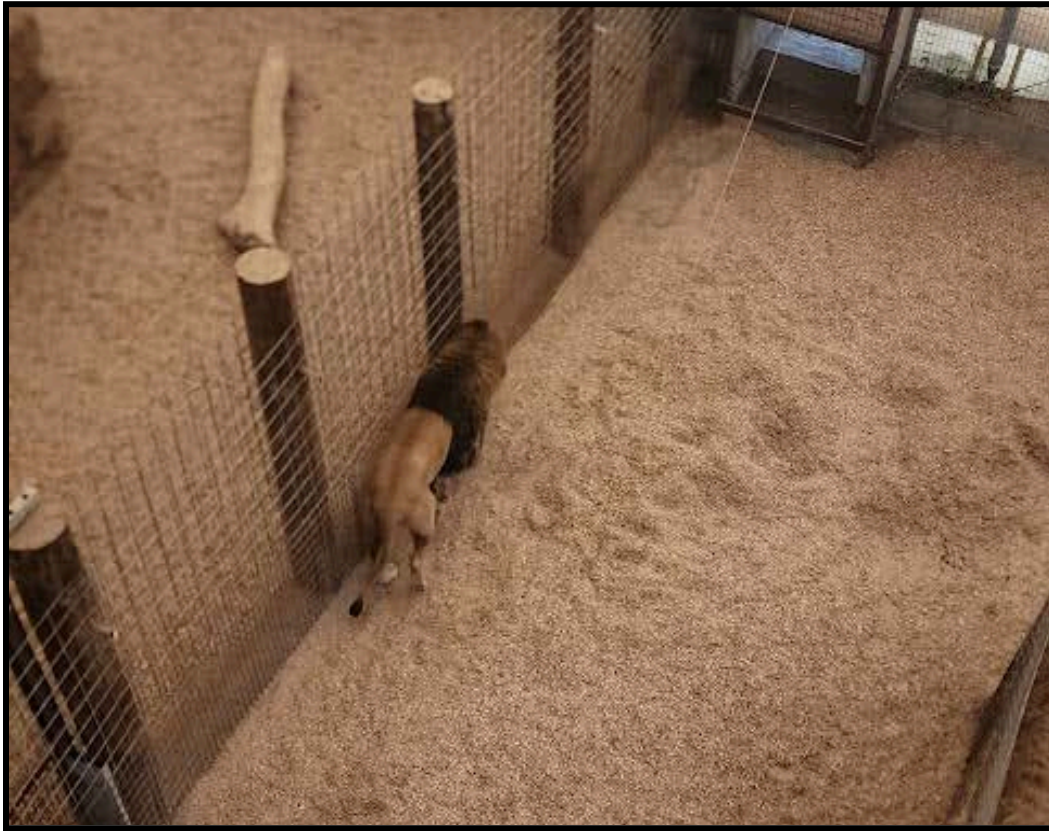
Note. A family of birds who made their home on the side of the elevated walkway.

Figure 8

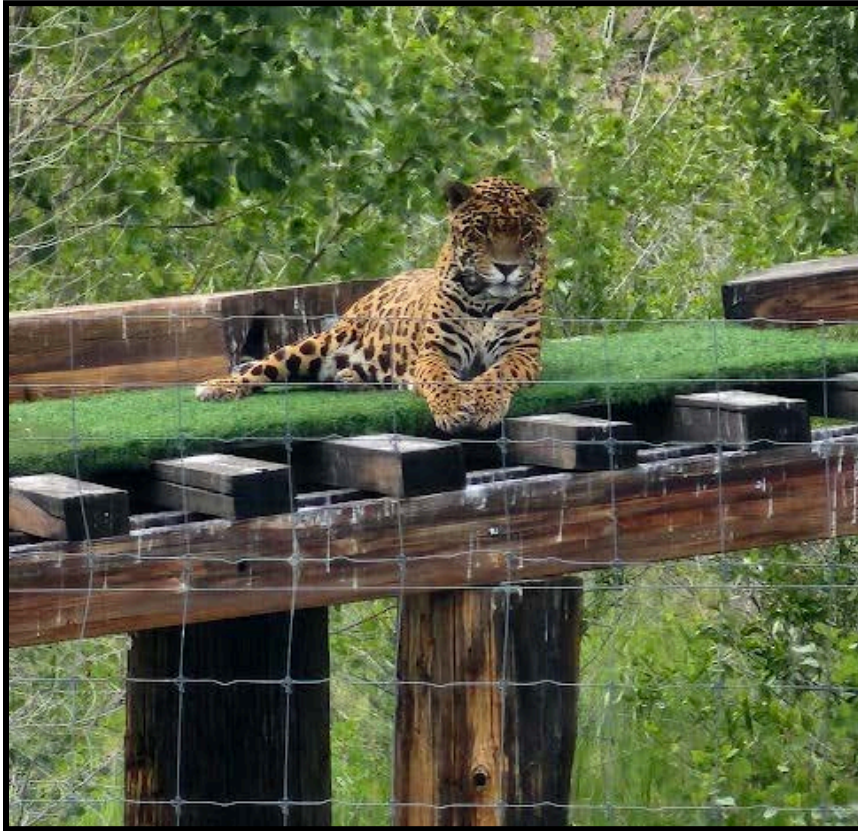
Bobcat



Note. Name unknown.

Figure 9*Hunter or Simba*

Note. Private Forfeiture – Male African Lions, Hunter and Simba were kept at a pseudo “sanctuary” in Mexico, where they were mistreated and given a poor diet, which resulted in vitamin deficiencies that affected gait/stability. A veterinarian took over ownership of the lions when their previous owners confessed a plan to shoot them to be rid of them, finding the animals to be “ugly and sick”. Thankfully, Hunter and Simba were surrendered to a wildlife rescue organization in Pachuca, Mexico, that works on a regular basis with our Sanctuary. Once they received proper medical care, both Lions, along with nine other animals with their own respective rescue stories, were transferred to our Keenesburg facility in November 2024. After periods of acclimation, each animal has grown to relish their newly found (but long-deserved) peace, world-class diets, and expansive space!

Figure 10*Manchas*

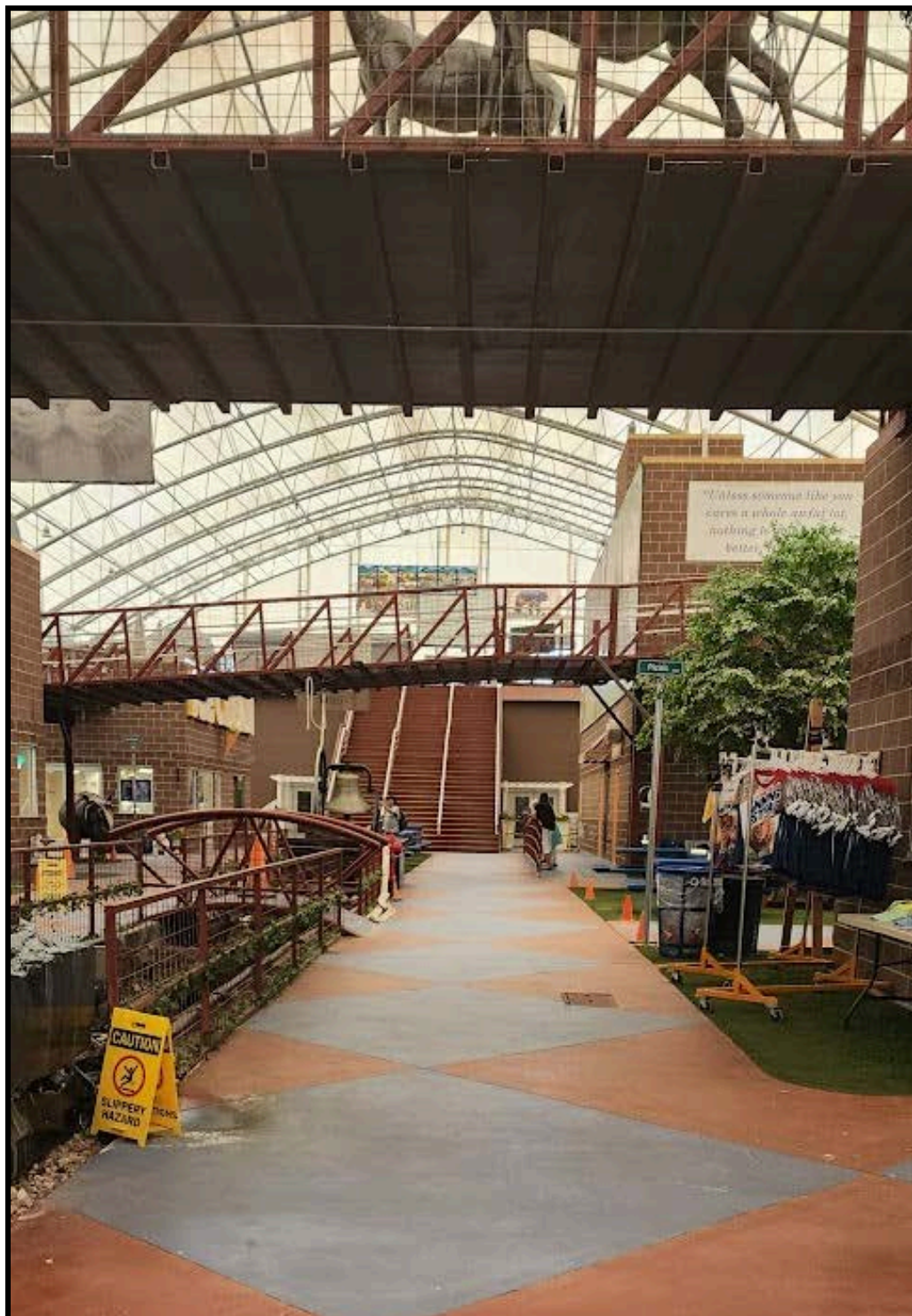
Note. Mexico Government Confiscation - Manchas is a four-year-old male Jaguar that was kept by private owners who purchased him as a cub and thought they would be able to keep him as their pet. Even though the family had proper permits to keep him, they didn't provide the attention and care that he needed. He was more or less left to be raised by the family's dogs, which caused him to be confused about his identity. Over time, due to the stress of being kept in such an unnatural environment, he began self-mutilating. His owners finally realized he could not survive or function as a pet, so they gave him to a wildlife rescue organization that works on a regular basis with our Sanctuary. Manchas was kept at their facility until he was able to be transferred to Colorado, where he will now be able to live and thrive as a powerful and majestic male Jaguar in one of the Sanctuary's large acreage habitats.

Figure 11*Sanctuary Bingo*

Note. My setup for the Sanctuary Bingo activity, complete with signage, stuffed animals, bingo cards, and a whiteboard where people could reflect on their sanctuary experience.

Figure 12*Habitat Design Challenge*

Note. Habitat created by a sanctuary visitor during the Habitat Design Challenge activity.

Figure 13*Elevated Walkway*

Note. Main sanctuary hall in the Welcome Center leading to the elevated walkway overhead.

Figure 14

The Author with her Family



Note. My family visiting me on the last day of my internship after the completion of my final shift.