Hands-on learning meets delicate care as Purdue University Northwest biology interns assist with rehabilitating injured and orphaned wildlife.

Upper-division biology students at Purdue University Northwest (PNW) who are interested in careers working with animals, wildlife rehabilitation, or attending veterinary school, now have the option of completing an internship with Humane Indiana Wildlife, a wildlife rehabilitation center located in Valparaiso.

“We’re very excited to be able to offer this internship opportunity to Purdue Northwest students,” said Vanessa S. Quinn, professor of Biological Sciences. “Students who are interested in the animal care and welfare field will be able to participate in a very structured set of experiences with an organization that has been doing this kind of work for years.”

Rachel Wilkening, a third-year biology major, is part of the first PNW internship class at the rehabilitation center.

“I was instantly interested in this opportunity,” stated the Hebron native who plans to become a veterinarian. “I have always been interested in wildlife and this gives me hands-on experience and the opportunity to learn more about all these different animals. It’s fascinating!”

The university partnered with Humane Indiana Wildlife to provide students with a hands-on real-world experience working with injured and orphaned wildlife. The internship provides a unique experience to observe a wide variety of different species, learn the natural history and care of those species and see first-hand the impact that urbanization can have on wildlife.

“Internships in the animal care field are important because so many employers are looking to hire staff who already have experience in the field,” said Nicole Harmon, director of Humane Indiana Wildlife.

The interns work alongside the wildlife staff to provide proper husbandry to the animals at the rehabilitation center. They also help the staff by feeding neonate wildlife being raised at the center, helping during intake examinations, delivering medications, when appropriate, and moving animals to pre-release enclosures.

In addition, interns have the opportunity to work directly with the wildlife rehabilitation specialists to perform all necessary steps to help animals heal and grow prior to release: learning handling techniques; appropriate feeding methods; why certain medications are prescribed; how they are administered and how dosages are determined.

The culmination of the interns’ work is helping to release animals back to the wild once they are of appropriate age or have healed from their injuries.

“We truly appreciate our partnership with Purdue Northwest,” Harmon said. “We have received dedicated, passionate students who are not only invested in their own education but also eager to help our mission and are truly interested in learning more about native wildlife. We look forward to continuing this partnership.”

“Internships are an important part of the educational experience,” Quinn stated. “Students gain confidence in their field, increase their marketability and develop networking opportunities that prove beneficial to them when looking for a job or applying to veterinary schools. We are excited to be able to offer this type of internship opportunity to our students.”
MEET HUMANE INDIANA WILDLIFE EDUCATION AMBASSADOR. POMONA THE PEREGRINE FALCON

Pomona came to Humane Indiana Wildlife in June of 2019 in very poor condition. After having been found multiple times on the 5th floor balcony of the county city building in South Bend, IN, where the city’s man-made Peregrine Falcon nest resides, she was finally rescued and brought to the center by long time rehabilitator, Carol Riewe. Upon admission she was taken to Arbor View Animal Hospital for a more thorough exam and was found to have sustained a broken coracoid, two ruptured air sacs, a fractured keel with a piece that broke off, fluid around her heart, and severe bruising. Due to the trauma of the injury her chest cavity was compressed, essentially changing the shape of her body. After months at the rehabilitation center, healing first in a small hospital cage and then moving to a small flight enclosure, she was finally ready to move to the large flight enclosure. When given the opportunity to fly at a longer distance she took off and flew full speed into the adjacent wall, rupturing her air sacs again and cutting her face. After seeing this troubling behavior, and factoring in her habit of hitting the initial building multiple times prior to her rescue, staff began to question the quality of her eyesight. A visit from Dr. Herbert from Arbor View Animal Hospital, confirmed our suspicions that Pomona is near-sighted, a condition not able to be seen with an ophthalmoscope, but something diagnosed behaviorally. As a result of this vision impairment and because her body cavity was compressed due to the trauma she was not able to be released back to the wild.

There are a few reasons why Pomona’s ambassadorship here at HIW is significant. The first is because she comes from a long line of Peregrine Falcons that were born and raised out of a man-made nest box in South Bend. The lineage of the Falcons that have resided there has been closely tracked since the box was installed back in the late 1970s. Biologists can tell you where Pomona’s great-great-great grandparents came from, and how far back in her line Peregrines were actually hatched in captivity and released.

The city of South Bend very affectionately watches over their Peregrines, and prior to their baseball team being purchased by the Cubs, their mascot was ‘Swoop’ the Peregrine Falcon. When Pomona came to us she was just over one month old and had bands on her that let us know that the band date was May 25th and that she was hatched on May 5, 2019 along with three other siblings. This was the very first time in decades that Peregrine Falcons were not on the endangered species list for the state of Indiana. After being placed on the list due to DDT, Peregrine numbers dropped to zero East of the Mississippi River. Every Peregrine Falcon that now resides on the Eastern part of our country can have their lineage traced back to falcons that were hatched, raised, and released by falconers and later biologists. Thanks to their hard work we now have nesting Peregrine Falcons all throughout Northwest Indiana and they have been delisted. Nests that we know of are in East Chicago, Gary, Michigan City, Burns Harbor, and in South Bend. It is not uncommon for us, now, to get a Peregrine Falcon into care at the rehabilitation center. While we don’t see a lot, we do see roughly 10 a year.

2021 SAVE THE DATES

6TH ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF OWLS
Saturday, October 23, 2021
9am-5pm
Porter County Fairgrounds
4-H Building
215 E. Division Rd., Valparaiso, IN
Tickets go on sale September 1 at Humaneindiana.org

80th Gala
Saturday, November 6, 2021
5pm-9pm
Avalon Manor, 3550 E. Lincoln Hwy., Merrillville, IN

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