Clinical Wildlife Research Externship

The Wildlife Center of Virginia (WCV) offers an externship designed to provide students with practical experience in many aspects of wild animal handling, research sample collection, medical management, and husbandry.

The Wildlife Center is a nonprofit conservation organization with a professionally staffed, fully equipped, 5,700-square-foot hospital. WCV admits approximately 4,300 patients annually, representing over 250 different species. Sixty-five percent of patients are birds, approximately half of which are raptors.

Throughout the twelve- to sixteen-week summer externship, the extern will receive instruction and hands-on experience in anatomy, physical restraint, diagnostic sample collection, appropriate sample storage, laboratory analysis, necropsy procedures, and data record keeping. This is a challenging program, and we expect hard work and dedication throughout the program. In return, the Center promises to introduce externs to many aspects of clinical wildlife medicine and conservation research in a friendly and professional teaching environment.

Qualifications:

- Self-motivated individual with a sincere interest in working with wildlife and the ability to work long hours
- Strong attention to detail, punctuality, initiative, and desire to learn
- Previous research experience strongly preferred
- At least two years of college coursework in a related degree program or equivalent prior animal experience
- Ability to lift 40 pounds
- Pre-exposure rabies vaccination required; series must be completed prior to start date

Responsibilities:

- Collect biological samples for internal and external research projects under the direction of Veterinary Interns, the Veterinary Research Fellow, and the Director of Veterinary Services, including blood, swabs, tissues, and other diagnostic or research specimens, with careful attention to proper labeling, storage, chain of custody, and data integrity.
- Perform gross necropsies for research sample collection on wild reptiles, birds, and mammals following appropriate training and supervision, assist with case documentation, data entry, and sample submission as indicated.

- Participate in daily clinical operations, including assisting with wildlife admissions, triage, treatments, and ongoing patient care, while supporting overall hospital workflow and case management under veterinary and technician supervision.
- Reconcile clinical and research data across medical records, laboratory results, and research databases to ensure accuracy, completeness, and usability for ongoing studies and reporting.
- Learn and perform safe, appropriate physical restraint techniques for wild reptiles, birds, and mammals, with an emphasis on animal welfare, staff safety, and minimizing stress.
- Demonstrate foundational knowledge of important diseases of North American wildlife, with particular emphasis on zoonotic diseases, emerging infectious diseases, and diseases of conservation concern.
- Develop an understanding of the medical, ethical, and legal considerations involved in wildlife treatment, rehabilitation, and conservation decision-making.
- Explore conservation medicine concepts and the role of the Wildlife Center of Virginia in wildlife disease surveillance, ecosystem health monitoring, conservation research, and public education.
- Complete a capstone project related to One Health and the externship experience, which may include data analysis, literature review, case series development, or research synthesis, and present findings prior to program completion.

Supervision and Hours:

All externs are supervised by four staff veterinarians, three veterinary technicians, and four wildlife rehabilitation staff members. The research extern will work closely with the Research Fellow. A typical workday consists of 11–14 hours, with weekend work being required.

Extern Schedule Options:

- (Thursday- Sunday): Four days per week with three consecutive days off; one rehabilitation day per month
- (Wednesday- Sunday): Five days per week with two consecutive days off; one rehabilitation day per week

Schedules are subject to change, but typically remain consistent throughout the externship. The first several weeks will be Monday- Thursday to overlap with the Research Fellow for appropriate training.

Application Process:

Application Window: November 1- January 15
Final Decision Notification: February 1
Externship Timeframe: A minimum of 12 consecutive weeks (April to June or June to August)

WILDLIFE CENTER OF VIRGINIA

Materials Required:

- Resume
- Letter of intent
- One reference from prior or current research supervisor strongly preferred (emailed directly to vetexternship@wildlifecenter.org)
- Completed WCV Externship Application Form (through the WCV website)
- Proof of rabies vaccination (if applicable)

Applicants must email vetexternship@wildlifecenter.org to confirm application materials have been received in their entirety. Interviews will be held after the application window has closed. Please note this is an unpaid student position that does not offer housing.