

# Animal Care 2023 Annual Report

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**PROJECT LEADER:** Kim Curren [kimberly.curren@calvertcountymd.gov](mailto:kimberly.curren@calvertcountymd.gov)

**PROJECT GOALS:** To assist staff with care of nature center animals currently housed at Flag Ponds Nature Park while providing unique volunteer opportunities.

## SKILLS NEEDED

- Capable of reading and following detailed instructions.
- Proficient at keeping detailed records.
- Can use and tare food scales.
- Comfortable working in close proximity to and handling animals like turtles, frogs, crickets, and mealworms.
- Comfortable preparing frozen mice as food for turtles.
- Adept at observing animal behaviors and adjusting what they do in close proximity to those animals.
- Able to bend and stoop and carry buckets of water up to about 10 pounds.

### Optional But Preferred Skills

- Experience working with reptiles and/or amphibians is a plus.

## REQUIREMENTS & EXPECTATIONS

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

## VOLUNTEER DUTIES

- **General Animal Care**
  - Feed, scrub and bask turtles
  - Feed the frog and mist the frog enclosure
  - Clean cages and change water
  - Provide food, water, and clean habitat for feeder crickets
  - In warm weather, bask the turtles outdoors
  - Perform tank maintenance such as water changes which includes algae scrubbing and cleaning filter cartridges

## VOLUNTEER TRAININGS

- **ANIMAL CARE TRAINING & QUALIFICATIONS:**
  - **In order to qualify to sign up for animal care**, volunteers first need to do a 1-hour training with Kim or other naturalist. Trainings will occur on the same day of the week that the volunteer intends to work, to maintain consistency with jobs performed. After that the volunteer will be qualified to respond to animal care opportunities on the Galaxy Digital Volunteer Portal <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>. When a new volunteer signs up for their first shift, staff will be present to answer questions.
  - **In order to maintain qualifications**, volunteers need to sign up for animal care opportunities at least once/month. If it has been longer than a month, volunteers need to arrange a time to meet with staff for a requalification training.

## PROJECT DATES

- After a long break in the Animal Care volunteer program due to the fire at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp, we started it back up again in August of 2023.
- Trainings are booked by appointment only, directly with Kim.

## SUMMARY OF 2023 ACTIVITIES

- The nature center animals who are the current residents of the Flag Ponds Nature Park education building are the Painted Turtle, Red-bellied Cooter, Red-eared Slider, Diamondback Terrapin, and Cope's Gray Treefrog; These are the animals in the care of the animal care volunteers.
  - The albino Snapping Turtle was temporarily relocated to the Calvert Marine Museum.
  - The Black Rat Snake and Corn Snake were temporarily relocated to Kings Landing Park.
  - The domestic mice were temporarily relocated to Gatewood Preserve.
  - The Red-tailed Hawk, Eastern Screech Owl, and Barred Owl still reside in their original outdoor enclosures at Battle Creek Cypress Swamp.
- Live crickets and mealworms are kept at Flag Ponds to be used as live food.
- New tank holdings had to be established for all of our animals, we went through a variety of different tank setups and filtration systems for the various tanks.
- Basking platforms were created using PVC, plastic screening, and in-water ramps for the Diamondback Terrapin tank and Red-eared Slider tanks.
- Gene Groshon built a large exterior basking platform "deck" for the tank currently being used by the Red-bellied Cooter and Painted Turtle.
- Gene installed a hose adapter for the sink in the storage room at Flag Ponds that can both fill and siphon tanks, making water changes much easier and more efficient.

## 2023 VOLUNTEERS

- Catherine Hogan
- Cynthia Eversole (and Jayden Eversole)
- Amanda Shores (and Julian Shores)

- Adam Curren (and Alex Curren)
- Adam Kohn
- Camryn Arnstein
- Joshua Lewis

**2023 VOLUNTEER HOURS: 31** from project start on August 26, 2023 – December 31, 2023

## 2023 UPDATES

- The diamondback terrapin “Itchy” and King Snake passed away in 2023. Since the nature center is still closed to the public, we will not seek replacements until re-opening to alleviate some of the animal care workload for a reduced office staff and to decrease the cost of food & supplies.
- Lydia Wells submitted for the appropriate state and federal permits required for the exhibit animals.

## RECOMMENDED STAFF TRAININGS

- All staff that are responsible for animal care should be trained as needed on new protocols such as water changes and filter media cleaning.
- Incorporate the animals housed at Kings Landing Park and Flag Ponds Nature Park into the overall Animal Care program.

## FUTURE PLANS

- Discussions about the future of our animal collection are wholly dependent on the future plans for the nature center itself, which will likely be completed in 2024
  - In discussions about the future, we are hoping to replace the King Snake with another King or possibly other small docile native species to use for education purposes, add a skink and/or salamander exhibit as was at the nature center in previous years, and possibly add to our frog collection.
  - Freshwater turtles may be placed in a protected outdoor pond exhibit behind the nature center, and the snapping turtle will return to the nature center in an indoor enclosure.
  - The diamondback terrapin may be relocated to another park or permanently rehomed as it does not fit the theme of the nature center as a display of life in the Bald Cypress swamp.
- Yearly assess quality of life for all animals including raptors, especially the hawk who at a certain point may need to be humanely euthanized when his disability causes him discomfort, inability to eat effectively, etc.

## HISTORY AND CURRENT AGES OF THE NATURE CENTER'S RAPTORS

### **RED-TAILED HAWK (male) age 21 in spring 2023**

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

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

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

### **EASTERN SCREECH OWL- Red Phase (sex unknown) at least age 11 in spring 2023**

Arrived Summer 2014 from Orphaned Wildlife in Lusby

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

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

### **BARRED OWL (female) at least age 7 in spring 2023**

Arrived in April 2018

Hit by a car near intersection of Rte 301 & 50

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

Still has extreme escape/avoidance behaviors when people are in her cage. Continue to provide

browse and think of ways to minimize stress and reduce the amount of time we spend in her mew.

Cope her beak and talons in her cage.

Access water pan from outside cage.

## OTHER ANIMALS IN OUR COLLECTION AS OF DECEMBER 2023

- Snakes
  - Corn Snake
  - Eastern Rat Snake
- Turtles
  - Diamondback Terrapin (at least 20 years old)
  - Common Snapping Turtle (albino, will be 33 in 2024)
  - Red-eared Slider
  - Red-bellied Cooter
  - Eastern Painted Turtle
- Other
  - Cope's Gray Treefrog
  - 3 domestic mice (for raptor trapping)
  - Feeder crickets and mealworms

*Supporting Calvert County's nature parks and natural spaces*



# CALVERT STEWARDS

## VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

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

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CALVERT STEWARDS VOLUNTEER PROGRAM  
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Volunteer Portal: <https://calvertstewards.galaxydigital.com/>

Calvert Nature Society: [www.calvertparks.org](http://www.calvertparks.org)

Calvert County Natural Resources Division:  
[www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources](http://www.calvertcountymd.gov/NaturalResources)

