

Benefits of Conservation Medicine: For All Wildlife and Southwest Wildlife

Southwest Wildlife is expanding into the field of conservation medicine because we are committed first and foremost to the welfare of our wildlife. The data collected as a result of humane conservation medicine research will contribute to the knowledge base with respect to general wildlife health and how to best treat individual animals that are sick or injured.

The fact that some diseases are changing in pattern or emerging in new animal populations reflects shifts or changes in the environment. For example, plague affects not only prairie dogs, but also the carnivores who depend upon them. While black-footed ferrets that are released into controlled areas are vaccinated, coyotes, foxes, and badgers are not protected. Until recently, all the protocols used in the field to collect samples from these carnivores required a lethal research methodology. We can contribute by developing new anesthetic protocols with the carnivores we treat in our clinic, so researchers in the field can capture, test, and release their wild counterparts unharmed. Our animals will require anesthesia as part of their rehabilitation, and we can develop protocols that are safe, easy, and reversible. Slowly, we will understand more about the diseases we choose to monitor, while we also learn more about the animals we rehabilitate.

The research and data collection conducted in the field of conservation medicine will not interfere with our mission of releasing those animals who can survive in the wild once they have matured and/or their injuries have healed. Some interns, such as vet techs and veterinarians, would be directly involved with hands-on animal care. However, all internships would include hours committed to the management and care of wildlife. Therefore, interns will actually improve the level of care the animals receive and, at the same time, offer us an opportunity to mentor and teach the next generation.

Internship opportunities are in high demand but in short supply. Our ability to offer high-quality positions with the potential for publication in scientific journals will increase our visibility in the scientific community. This is likely to cause general donations to increase and, at the same time, qualify us for additional conservation medicine-related funding.