

Becoming a Wildlife Professional

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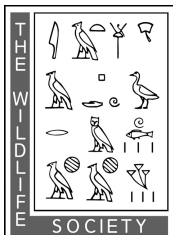
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FOREWORD

It's not about the money" is a phrase often used but rarely backed up by personal examples. But, as I have spent my entire 45-year career in the wildlife profession, I can say to all who choose to go down this path that "it's not about the money." There are far greater rewards at the end of a career in wildlife biology and management. Being at peace with the field you choose, one that is focused on a resource that cannot speak for itself, is gratifying and fulfilling way beyond material things.

The authors of *Becoming a Wildlife Professional* have covered, from A to Z, the whys, the hows, and what to expect, whether you choose to step into graduate school first or move right into a position after an undergraduate degree. The authors have provided aspiring wildlife biologists with step-by-step instructions and great advice on how to obtain their dream job in the wildlife profession. I have never seen a book of its equal. The authors should be especially commended for emphasizing involvement in professional societies, as well as how to act professionally, an attribute many students don't consider until they are immersed in their careers.

Some of the nuts and bolts chapters deal with required skill sets, such as writing resumes and the interview process, but one of the rich characteristics of the book is the collection of personal insights from wildlife professionals throughout North America who share their philosophy about and experiences with the numerous employment opportunities available within the profession. These will be of tremendous benefit to aspiring wildlife biologists and educators, for it is the intimacy

of individual feelings and reflections when we see things as they are, not as they should be. This aspect of the book will help guide young biologists into the career path that is right for them.

Lastly, the authors should be commended for touching on diversity. For example, when I began my career, our profession had a very real challenge in addressing deficiencies of gender involvement, let alone ethnic diversity. Over the past 30 years, we have embraced this, and more women are joining our professional ranks. At the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, half of our graduate students currently are women, who are not afraid or intimidated by getting out "in the wilds" of the brush country of deep South Texas. This is not to say that the gender issue is resolved, because we also need to retain women in the workforce. In addition, there are many jobs that don't require an outdoor focus. But to me, our profession's future is indeed precarious if we do not correct the lack of ethnic diversity.

Having spent a cumulative 80 years in the education process, the authors are extremely qualified to present this book to young and gifted readers who have an interest in wildlife biology and management. There is not a glut of information on the subject, so this book has been greatly needed and has been a long time in coming.

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PREFACE

The wildlife profession is still in its infancy, having its beginning in the 1930s, with Aldo Leopold (1933) writing the first wildlife management book in North America, entitled *Game Management*. Since that time, the wildlife profession has made numerous advancements (e.g., from management focused on game species and hunters to more inclusive management designed for all wildlife and stakeholders). As a result, wildlife management is now based on science and governed by laws to serve the common good.

Unfortunately, one aspect where the wildlife profession has not been as successful is in making future generations aware of the multitude of employment opportunities one could enjoy as a wildlife professional. Many youths grow up with a love of the outdoors but have no idea (or guidance) that their passion for the outdoors could become a career. For example, I [SEH] was conducting a wildlife inventory on a property in Texas and came upon a group of high school students who were camping. In talking with them, they asked about my equipment. I explained that I was a field biologist and was surveying the local wildlife. Their puzzled looks were obvious, and I had to explain what I meant by *field biologist*. None of the campers had heard that term before, nor did they understand that not all biologists work inside a laboratory. They were amazed to hear that I got paid to be outdoors and conduct wildlife surveys. Not only did I open their eyes to the wildlife profession, but, equally, they opened mine. In addition, PRK went to grade school and high school in North Africa and Europe. He was always interested in wildlife, but did not know about the profession until he stumbled on an Ohio State University student chapter of The Wildlife Society when he was a college sophomore. Many incoming wildlife-major university students, including graduate students, also are unaware

of the variety of career options available to them within the discipline. In 2014, the University of Montana hosted a special graduate seminar to introduce wildlife graduate students to the numerous jobs available to them after graduation, because of their naïveté about the subject. Although our experience is limited to the regions where we have worked (Alabama, Arizona, Indiana, Montana, and Texas), similar stories are told by professors across the United States. Most wildlifers think the general public knows about our profession, but this assumption couldn't be more wrong. We conducted an informal survey of high school career counselors and asked them what advice they would give to high school students who said that they had a passion for animals, would rather be outdoors than inside, and loved outdoor activities, such as camping, hiking, hunting, and fishing. The responses we received from nearly 75 counselors were nearly identical: veterinarian and park ranger. Only a third of the counselors added game warden and, shockingly, none mentioned wildlife biologist—in any capacity (federal, state, or private)!

The majority of the general public is not aware of our profession. It's no wonder why today's youth play games in the virtual rather than the real outdoors. We, as biologists, need to make future generations aware of our profession. This book is intended as a step in that direction. Its purpose is to highlight and describe the multitude of employment opportunities available within the wildlife profession, and to offer step-by-step guidance in becoming a wildlife professional.

This volume consists of 12 chapters, beginning with why someone might choose a career in wildlife in the first place (chapter 1). We then discuss the need for an undergraduate wildlife education and what to expect from it, as well as offer advice on how to be successful as a student and within the pro-

fession (chapters 2 and 3). Chapter 4 covers the skills needed for conservation careers. Chapter 5 is the central theme of the book and describes nearly 100 wildlife-related jobs in 35 agencies and organizations. Next, we discuss various practical aspects: the benefits of being a member of professional societies (chapter 6), the development of a quality resume (chapter 7), and the art of the interview process (chapter 8). Chapter 9 discusses the need to always act professionally. The following

two chapters present the pros and cons of advanced degrees from the perspective of professors (chapter 10) and students (chapter 11). Lastly, chapter 12 examines cultural diversity within the wildlife profession.

It is never too late to plan your future and consider career options. It is our hope that this volume will aid future generations of wildlifers in finding the job of their dreams.