

# Wildlife Express!

Volume 24/Issue 4

Wildlife Careers

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## Wild Careers: Wildlife Biologist



Photo courtesy IDFG

# Let's Talk About . . . Wildlife Careers

"I want to work with wildlife when I am an adult!"

Many people say this when they are young. Working with animals seems like a lot of fun, and it can be fun and rewarding. At times, it also can be cold, hot, wet, dirty, stinky, and tricky.

People that study and manage wild animals are called wildlife biologists. They need to know a lot about wildlife and what they need to survive. All animals need four things to survive – food, water, shelter and space. These things make up an animal's home or habitat. Wild animals cannot tell us what they need. How do wildlife biologists learn about wildlife? They watch wildlife, sometimes catch them or look for wildlife signs. Wildlife biologists are a bit like detectives.

Signs are clues that animals leave behind as they go about their lives. Signs are things like tracks, holes, stored food, nests, or scat. Scat is a fancy word for poop. Looking at animal poop might sound gross, but scat can give us many important clues about an animal's life. If you want to be a wildlife biologist, you will most likely look at animal scat. Scat tells us what an animal has been eating. Scat that contains hair and bones was left by a predator. Scat with many seeds was left by an herbivore. Even the size and shape of scat are important clues.

Another way biologists learn about wildlife is by setting out hair snares. A hair snare is made of strong cardboard folded into a triangle. At each end of the triangle are stiff brushes. Bait, usually meat, is placed in the middle. As an animal reaches in to grab the meat, it rubs against the brushes and leaves some hair behind. Sometimes biologists will set barbed wire fences around a stinky bait to snag hairs. Many things can be learned from hair. For example, biologists can

tell the species of the animal and tell if it is male or female.

Once wildlife biologists have an idea of wildlife's needs and the habitat that is available, they can manage wildlife. They try to have wildlife populations that are in the best interests of wildlife and people. They try to make sure that we have enough members of a species but not too many. If there are too many animals, they may starve to death or make each other sick. This is one reason why we have hunting seasons. By hunting, people help control wildlife populations and feed their families.

If you are interested in becoming a wildlife biologist, a love of wildlife, nature and science is a must. You need to have a variety of skills since wildlife biologists do many different things. You might trap a deer, build a fence, draw an animal's blood, plant shrubs, pull weeds, or even talk to school kids. You will need a college degree in wildlife management, ecology or zoology. To get your "dream job," you will probably need a Master's Degree. That means at least six years of college, but the rewards are great. You will be working in beautiful places with amazing wildlife. You may even get the chance to save an animal from extinction.





# Becoming a Wildlife Biologist

As you have read in this issue of Wildlife Express, being a wildlife biologist is a pretty cool job. But you don't have to wait until you are an adult to get started. You can begin learning the skills to be a wildlife biologist right in your own backyard. **Here are a few ideas:**

1. Keep lists of the animals you see in your yard or neighborhood. Organize your lists by season, month, time-of-day, or another category that interests you. Do you see any patterns? See if you can figure out what causes those patterns.
2. Put up a bird feeder and observe the different kinds of birds you see. Try changing the kinds of seeds in the feeder to see if that changes the kinds of birds your feeder attracts. Put your feeder in different locations in your yard to see what happens. Get several different types of feeders and observe them to see if certain birds like certain feeders. As you watch your feeders, make drawings of the birds. Jot down notes about what the birds are doing. Record the temperature and weather conditions. These are called "field notes," and they are very important in helping wildlife biologists do their jobs.
3. On a snowy day during Christmas vacation, do some tracking in your yard and your neighborhood. Snow tracking can give you a lot of information about the wildlife living around you. Follow some tracks to see where they go. See if you can figure out what the animal was doing. Look for tracks of different kinds of animals. Can you tell if they were walking, trotting, or running? Here in Idaho, snow track surveys tell wildlife biologists a lot about wildlife in winter.

Learning to be a good observer will help you on your way to becoming a wildlife biologist!

# Aldo Leopold

## The Father of Wildlife Management

**"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."**

*Aldo Leopold*

Aldo Leopold was born in Iowa in 1887. He grew up exploring the woodlands and marshes around the Mississippi River. He listened to the whistling of ducks' wings, investigated mink dens and became skillful at reading animal sign.

When Aldo Leopold was a boy and young man, there really was no such thing as wildlife management. There were few laws telling when people could hunt or how many animals people were allowed to harvest. Aldo Leopold's father thought there should be some restrictions on hunting. He believed that it was wrong to hunt birds during the nesting season, and this was passed on to Aldo.

While at college, Aldo Leopold studied ornithology (the study of birds) and natural history. He earned a Master's Degree in Forestry and spent the first part of his career working for the Forest Service. Aldo Leopold didn't stay with the Forest Service very long. He wanted a job in wildlife and conservation.

Aldo Leopold believed that science and technology could be used to improve and restore wildlife and their habitat. He began researching wildlife and became the expert. His work was published in the textbook Game Management. The University of Wisconsin hired Leopold to teach the first wildlife management class in 1933. Wildlife management was born, and Aldo Leopold became known as the "father" of wildlife management.

Aldo Leopold's goal in his wildlife ecology class was "to teach the student to see the land, to understand what he sees, and enjoy what he understands." He believed that "the land" included everything – soil, plants and animals. Many of Aldo Leopold's ideas are still taught today.

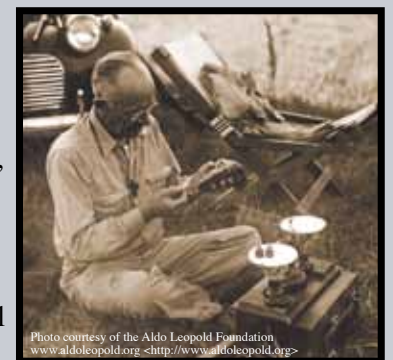


Photo courtesy of the Aldo Leopold Foundation  
[www.aldoleopold.org](http://www.aldoleopold.org) <<http://www.aldoleopold.org>>

# Wildlife Vet

Dr. Mark Drew, DVM

Wildlife Veterinarian---If this sounds like a cool combination of working with wildlife as a veterinarian, you are right! For the last 12 years, I have worked as a wildlife veterinarian for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

I got my Bachelor of Science degree in wildlife management and biology, and I did a lot of chemistry, too. Then I went to graduate school and studied how ticks affect moose. That might sound gross, but it helped me get my Master of Science degree! After that, I went to veterinary school. When I finished vet school, I took a job in a veterinary clinic, treating both small animals like dogs and cats, and large animals like cattle and horses. But I decided to get advanced training in wildlife and zoo animal medicine, so I completed special training called a residency in Zoo and Wildlife Medicine. Then I worked for wildlife management agencies and universities for about 10 years before coming to Idaho.



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**I**'m pretty lucky to get to work with really cool animals in a really cool place.

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In my job, I get to do lots of things with wildlife, but not like a regular small or large animal veterinarian. First, most of my patients are wild and don't want anything to do with me! This means I cannot get too close to them. Instead, I rely on biologists to capture the animals so that I can examine them. Most of my work with animals involves collecting samples to try to figure out if the animal are healthy. I also might try to see if the herd or population is healthy.

I also deal with lots of animals that have already died. I get to investigate why the animal died or how healthy it was before it died. It's not as space-age as CSI, but it's still pretty cool to be able to figure out why an animal died. It's also great to help find out if Fish and Game can do anything to prevent the spread or transmission of disease germs within wildlife populations.



Being a veterinarian was a dream of mine for a long time starting in high school. But I also knew that I wanted to work with wildlife. So, combining the two was logical to me, but very difficult to do when I was in school. It's easier nowadays, but you will still have to work hard. There is lots of school to finish – at least 4 years of college, then 4 years of veterinary school, and maybe more if you want extra training. It also can be difficult to find a job in this field. But, I really enjoy the challenge of working with free-ranging wild animals. I think I'm pretty lucky to get to work with really cool animals in a really cool place.

# My Career is a Puzzle!

*Jim Hayden, Regional Wildlife Manager*



When you walk out your front door, you step into the middle of a huge, gigantic puzzle – the outdoors! Helping to figure out that puzzle is a big part of my job as a wildlife biologist, and I love it. I get to try to solve questions like “Where do black bears go when they want to hibernate for the winter?” and “How many deer can we expect to have in the woods next year?” I’m a curious guy, and the great outdoors is just full of things to figure out and learn.

I guess I was pretty lucky as a kid. I grew up in the Appalachian Mountains of northern Pennsylvania, at the edge of a small town. We had a little creek (we called it “The Crick”) running by our house. I explored that creek A LOT, building dams, learning how to find crayfish, catching minnows, and trapping muskrats. I was always going on hikes over the hills with my friends, and just a half mile hike away was a small reservoir where we could fish for bluegills and later hunt for rabbits and turkeys.



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**I** am a curious guy, and the great outdoors is just full of things to figure out and learn.

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My dad was a wildlife biologist, and I grew up trapping turkeys and doing some things that seemed a bit odd, like measuring grass. After getting a degree in Forestry, I moved out west and worked several different outdoor jobs. I decided wildlife work was maybe the most interesting for me. I wanted to become a wildlife biologist to keep working on those many wildlife puzzles and questions. That meant another couple years of school, but it was all real interesting stuff, and time seemed to fly by! Before I knew it, I was a biologist here in Idaho!

Now it’s 26 years later, and I still find my job totally fascinating. I’ve been able to study mountain goats in the high mountains, trap black and grizzly bears to put on radio-collars, do helicopter flights to count elk, moose, and deer, use an airboat to trap and move geese, and hike elk winter ranges to see how well the elk and deer food is holding out. I guess I could write all day and not get to the end of the special and fun things I’ve been able to do as part of my job.

If you have a lot of curiosity, like puzzles, and like working in the outdoors, check out becoming a wildlife biologist!



# My Job Is Outdoor Fun!

By Anna Owsiak, Regional Wildlife Biologist

Many people think the job I have is the best in the world, and they are right! I work on a Wildlife Management Area near Hells Canyon. A Wildlife Management Area, also called a WMA, is made up of important habitats that wildlife need to survive. The WMA where I work has sagebrush habitat that is needed all year by mule deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and chukar. Some of Idaho's other WMA's provide wetlands and lakes for waterfowl, forests for elk and black bears, and rivers and riparian areas where pheasants, white-tailed deer, river otters and other animals live.

Even though I work very hard every day, my job is really a lot of fun! As a kid, I grew up on a farm in Michigan. I loved taking care of the animals and working outside doing farm chores. Working on a WMA is, in many ways, like working on a farm. Almost every day I get to be outside, working to improve habitat for wildlife. Some of the things I do include controlling harmful weeds, growing food plots for birds to use in the winter, planting trees and shrubs that will eventually become shelter and food for deer and elk, and many other projects. Sometimes I get to use a tractor, backhoe, or ATV to get chores done. I also hike on the hillsides or even ride a horse to get to all the places I have to go on the WMA.

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**A**lmost every day I get to be outside, working to improve habitat for wildlife.

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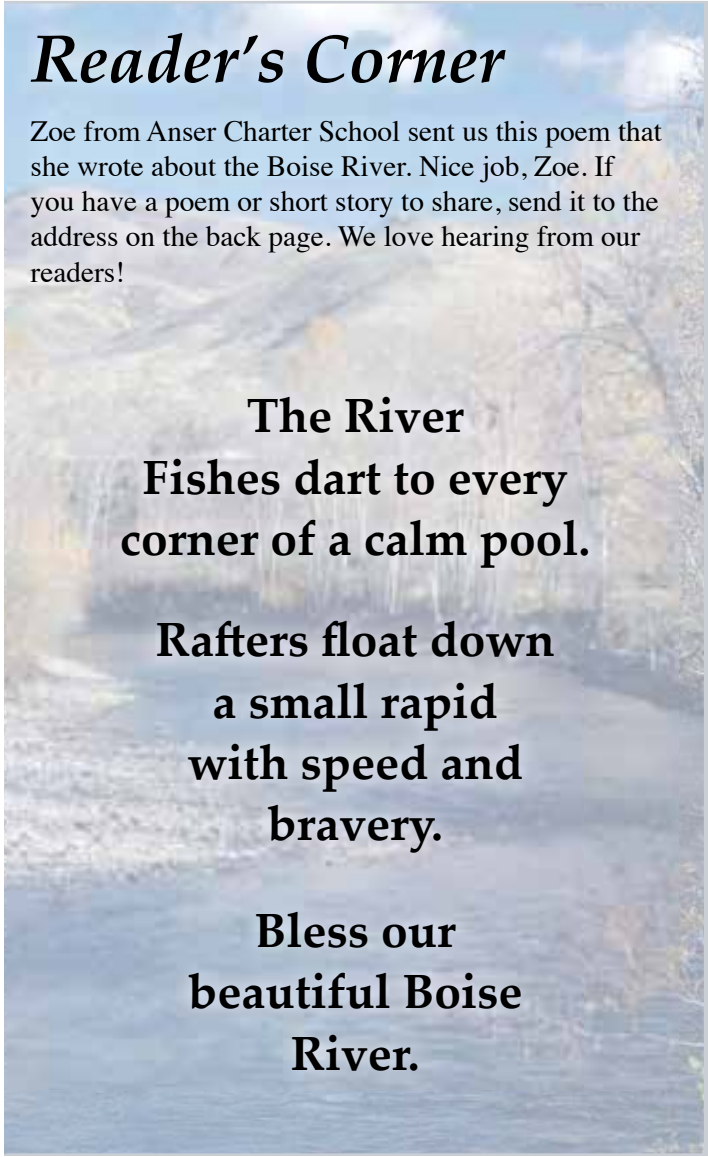
Helping people is also a large part of my job. I frequently answer questions from hunters and help them find places to hunt. I also work with farmers and ranchers to help them improve wildlife habitat on their land. You may even find me at your school, giving a

presentation on wildlife habitat or helping teach hunter education. Since I am a wildlife biologist, I also help my co-workers catch and radio collar deer, count elk from a helicopter, and survey sage grouse leks where male sage grouse strut to attract a mate each spring.

I meet many different people each year who want to know more about wildlife and the WMA I manage. One of the very best parts of my job is sharing my wildlife knowledge with others to help them have fun in the great outdoors!

## Reader's Corner

Zoe from Anser Charter School sent us this poem that she wrote about the Boise River. Nice job, Zoe. If you have a poem or short story to share, send it to the address on the back page. We love hearing from our readers!



**The River**  
**Fishes dart to every**  
**corner of a calm pool.**

**Rafters float down**  
**a small rapid**  
**with speed and**  
**bravery.**

**Bless our**  
**beautiful Boise**  
**River.**

# From City Kid to Wildlife Biologist

*Regan Berkley, Regional Wildlife Biologist*

I grew up in the suburbs and had limited outdoor experiences as a kid. However, when I did have an opportunity to spend time outdoors, I always felt at home, whether hiking with family or friends or spending weeks at summer camp. I also loved working with animals. I dreamed of becoming a veterinarian or a marine biologist. I knew these professions would mean I needed to go to college, so I worked hard in school to be able to go to a good college.

In college, another student told me her dad was a wildlife biologist. This was the first time I'd heard of that career! From that moment on, I knew that's what I wanted to be. The more I looked into it, the more I realized it wouldn't be easy. It would take many years of college, and even after that, getting a job might be tough. However, I was determined to become a wildlife biologist. I worked hard to get good grades, and I found jobs during the summers that gave me great experience.

To be a wildlife biologist for Fish and Game, you need to have a Master's Degree. To get a Master's Degree, you not only take more college classes but you also do an in-depth field study of a particular animal. I was fortunate enough to study bighorn sheep for my Master's Degree. I worked on that project with other biologists from Idaho Department of Fish and Game. I showed them that I could be a good wildlife biologist. Soon after earning my degree, I got a job as a real wildlife biologist! I have worked for Fish and Game for more than five years.

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**I** always felt at home, whether hiking with family or friends or spending weeks at summer camp.

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I love my job, but I would not call it easy. I do a little of everything including participating in setting hunting seasons, flying around in a helicopter counting deer, elk, bighorn sheep and mountain goats, and entering data and writing articles at my computer. I also help hunters with ideas on where to hunt and give presentations on wildlife management. Sometimes I work on weekends, in the evenings, or early in the morning before the sun comes up. But I love it all! I get to see many wonderful things like little hidden lakes in the central Idaho mountains, great big bull elk, cougars running through the snow, and happy hunters with a cooler full of chukars. It's a great job! I'd recommend it to anyone like me who feels at home in the outdoors and loves to see and study wildlife.



# Wildlife Word Search

H C R A E S E R W C G D Z S B  
 P A R T F I E I S N Y M E I I  
 M A N A G E L V I N D M J G O  
 L X O X Q D A G R I A Q T N L  
 W N P K L G N M Q E T R C S O  
 R Y U I M E P F X W S V E S G  
 D E F F L H O Q H E T B T I I  
 F E W L P O P U L A T I O N S  
 R W A A Y G S J T T N A R V T  
 H H I N R C Q I D L L L P K O  
 C K R J A D B C D A E L C M E  
 Q Z M T G A I E E N L B N R T  
 D I O N H R O N S P D O X Z K  
 N U Y Y W A W O G D I X Z T A  
 I E S S U O P E D O W S W O I

Find these wildlife management words in the puzzle:

BIOLOGIST  
 CHALLENGING  
 FUN  
 HABITAT  
 MANAGE  
 OBSERVE  
 POPULATIONS  
 PROTECT  
 RESEARCH  
 REWARDING  
 SCAT  
 SIGNS  
 SNARE  
 TRAP  
 WILDLIFE

## WILDLIFE EXPRESS

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WE WOULD LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

If you have a letter, poem or question for *Wildlife Express*, it may be included in a future issue! Send it to the address printed above!

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