

In the Spotlight

Name: Maria Rush

Organization: Outer Banks Wildlife Shelter, Newport, NC



How did you get started rehabbing? I was influenced and encouraged to rehab by a friend who moved here from California. She was a falconer's apprentice and had her state and federal permits.

How long have you been rehabbing? Since 1998.

Who was your mentor or who is someone you admire. Stephanie Goetzinger (former Director of the Outer Banks Wildlife shelter, where I work) and Lessie Davis. They were both my preceptors in wildlife rehabilitation.

What animals do you work with? Birds, mammals and reptiles. Being on the coast, I work a lot with sea birds such as Gulls, Pelicans, Cormorants, Northern Gannets, and marsh birds such as Great Blue Herons and White Egrets. I basically treat all animals indigenous to down east, coastal North Carolina, except the rabies vector species.

What animal do you enjoy working with most? I am known around here as the "Dove Girl." I have developed an affection for mourning doves and they for me, I guess. I don't really have a favorite animal to work with, although I can think of a few least favorites looking at the scars on my hands and arms. I remember a Northern Gannet that was a real handful.

Do you have a favorite rehab experience? It's funny how all I can think of is the worst experience. I was reluctantly swimming after a pelican in the ocean in January!

Besides working with wild animals, do you have any domestic pets? Yes! Here's my list an African grey, a ring-necked dove, two parakeets, a cockatiel, two pigeons, a guinea pig, two rabbits, a dog, two cats and guppies. All are rescue animals. Even the fish!

Any non-animal family members? My supportive husband, Keith.

What are your hobbies? Nature walks, bird watching, butterfly gardening, playing the viola, violin and guitar.

What do you feel is your greatest accomplishment? Utilizing the years of experience I've gained throughout my many years in wildlife rehabilitation and applying what I've learned to all aspects of my life are real personal accomplishments. I cherish the knowledge achieved and medical skills developed as a clinic supervisor, the interpersonal skills I've honed mentoring volunteers, my ever growing appreciation for what nature means to me and all the personality traits that have become me over the years, such as tenacity, can-do attitude and compassion. But I must say, longevity in the field of wildlife rehab is something at the top of my accomplishments list, as well.

What do you like about being part of WRNC? I like my affiliation with WRNC because it has become the wildlife rehabilitator in the field's organized voice to relay rehabilitation concerns to state agencies and a vehicle to keep those lines of communication open. I also like having yearly conferences to address professional development and education and to network with fellow rehabbers.

Since you are multi-faceted and extensively experienced rehabber, in your opinion, where do you think the greatest need for improvement lies in the rehab community? I feel all wildlife rehabilitators should always conduct business in a professional manner when dealing with the public; this includes knowledge, speech and attire.