

# The Student Chronicles

Newsletter from the SDWG

Feb 2017

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## Letter from the Chair

Hello Everyone!

My name is Kristi Confortin, and I am thrilled to be your 2017 Chair of the Student Development Working Group! I would like to take the time to thank the outgoing Chair, Krysten Zummo, and the outgoing Past-Chair Matt Gould, for all their dedication over the years to our working group. They allowed me to see what this working group has to offer and I am blessed to learn from them.

For you to better understand who I am and where I came from, here is a brief introduction of my background: I received my bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from SUNY Cobleskill in New York in 2014. I am now currently receiving my master's degree at Ball State University in Indiana, researching the roosting ecology of the eastern small-footed bat. In my undergraduate years, I was very active in our Student Chapter. I served as Treasurer, Vice President and lastly President. I was also the coordinator of our annual Fish and Wildlife Festival. The Wildlife Society has provided me with many wonderful opportunities to continue my career path. Being a part of this working group allows me to be involved on a national level and to work with students with similar passions. I look forward to serving as your Chair for the upcoming year!

The mission of the Student Development Working Group is to:

- Promote increased student awareness of TWS membership benefits
- Help prepare student members for professional wildlife careers

It is my goal over the upcoming year to be the bridge for the students by working with TWS Council and Staff to improve communication between both student chapters and between students and their respective state chapters and sections. By doing so, it will allow students to see the benefits that TWS and SDWG provide. This year we are excited to launch our new networking forum Google Groups, which will allow communication between students and their student chapters throughout the year.

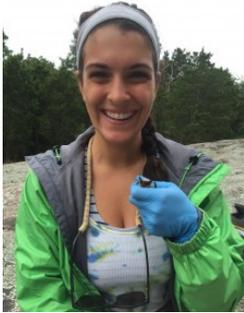
Student attendance at the past few annual conferences have been at a record high. TWS is excited to work with students to provide more opportunities. As students, we are the next generation for this profession and we have to work together to continue to protect what we care for.

If you should have any questions, ideas that you would like the SDWG to consider, or would like to become more involved with the working group, please feel free to email me at any time. Also, be sure to check out our SDWG Facebook page to find current information relevant to opportunities for students.

Once again, I am very excited and honored to serve as your Chair for the coming year. I look forward to being the voice for students on TWS's Council. I hope everyone has a wonderful spring semester.

Kristi Confortin, Chair

## Officer Biographies



### **Kristi Confortin, AWB®, Chair**

Kristi Confortin is currently a graduate student at Ball State University researching the summer roosting ecology of the eastern small-footed bat (*Myotis leibii*) in the Shawnee National Forest in Illinois. She is using radio telemetry to track eastern small-footed bats to their roost rocks each day. She will be examining roost characteristics and spatial distribution of roosts across their landscape. Kristi received her bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from the State University of New York at Cobleskill in 2014. While she was at SUNY Cobleskill, she was greatly involved with her Student Chapter. In her Student Chapter, she held multiple officer positions and ran their Annual Fisheries and Wildlife Festival. Kristi is a certified Associate Wildlife Biologist® from The Wildlife Society. She has traveled to four Annual Conferences and knew she wanted to continue to be a part of this wonderful organization. The Student Development Working Group (SDWG) was a great way for her to transition at a national level. Kristi is very excited to work with students, as they are the next generation in this profession. She looks forward to helping many students continue to follow their passion and reach their goals.



### **Phillip Stephenson, AWB®, Chair-elect**

Phillip Stephenson is currently a master's student in the Biology Department at The University of Arkansas studying species diversity of bees in emergent wetlands throughout the eastern portion of Arkansas. He received a bachelor's degree in Wildlife and Fisheries Science with minors in Forestry and Watersheds at The University of Tennessee in 2013. While at The University of Tennessee, he served as the Fundraising Chair for the 2012 Southeastern Conclave, Deer Check Station Coordinator, and President. During his summers, he has worked for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Louisiana, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, and with Mississippi State University to name a few. Phillip has spent the last two years as the President of The University of Arkansas Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society and is currently transitioning to the Secretary position to train the next class of officers. Phillip enjoys hunting and going to as many sporting events as possible. He is thrilled to be a part of the SDWG, and hopes to grow TWS student membership by 10%, increase communication between the student chapters and the Student Development Working Group, provide fundraising ideas for small and large student chapters, and promote student/young professional development through the mentoring program, TWS certification program, and through social media.



### **Krysten Zummo, AWB®, Past Chair**

Krysten received her bachelor's degree in Wildlife Management from SUNY Cobleskill in 2011. It was here where she first became an active member of The Wildlife Society, serving as Student Chapter President and Coordinator of the 2011 Northeast Student Conclave. She has been working with the Student Development Working Group since graduation, serving in each board position and as the Student Liaison to Council. She has also served on the New Mexico Chapter board and currently serves as the Chair of the Early Career Professional Working Group, the SDWG's representative to The Wildlife Professional's Editorial Advisory Board, and is the incoming Northeastern Colorado representative to the CCTWS Board. *(continued on page 3)*

## Officer Biographies, continued

After graduation from her undergrad, Krysten was hired by the college as the Department of Fisheries, Wildlife, & Environmental Studies Wildlife Technician. After two years in this position, she left to begin a master's position studying the effects of climate and habitat on scaled quail populations in south-central New Mexico. Her research focused on how climate variables, such as timing and amount of rainfall and habitat structure influenced the survival and reproduction on scaled quail. She recently began a new position as the Northeast Colorado Farm Bill Wildlife Biologist for Pheasants Forever/NRCS/CPW.



### **Ashley Wurth, Treasurer**

Ashley Wurth is a current graduate student at The Ohio State University studying how urbanization influences the behavior and genetics of coyotes. She works mainly in the Chicago metropolitan area collecting behavioral data and running genetic analyses under the supervision of Dr. Stanley Gehrt. She obtained her bachelor's degree at Colorado State University where she was the President of The Wildlife Society Student Chapter for two years and helped organize annual banquet fundraisers. She worked on various undergraduate research projects studying orange-crowned warblers and mesocarnivores. She has also helped with several environmental education programs utilizing camera traps or leading nature field trips. She has travelled to or presented at many state, regional, and national TWS meetings and conclaves. She is excited to become an active member in the SDWG as this year's treasurer.



### **Rob Lewis, AWB®, Secretary**

Rob is a second year Master of Natural Resources student at Utah State University and an Associate Wildlife Biologist®. He received a bachelor's degree in Wildlife and Conservation Biology from Murray State University in southwest KY in 2015. At Murray, he researched lead toxicology in eastern gray squirrels as well as wildlife damage management at general aviation airports. While at Murray, Rob served as the secretary and two-term President of the Student Chapter of The Wildlife Society (TWS) and was named the 2015 Wildlife Student of the Year. He presented research at several TWS affiliated conferences, including the 16<sup>th</sup> Wildlife Damage Management Conference. He worked for the Department of the Navy as a contracted Natural Resources Technician conducting avian surveys as well as a Wildlife Specialist with USDA APHIS Wildlife Services working to reduce bird-aircraft strikes. He now serves the profession as the Secretary of the Student Development Working Group and the Student Board Member on the TWS Wildlife Damage Management Working Group and he reviews manuscripts for the journal *Human-Wildlife Interactions*. His experiences at the university and the professional levels have served to highlight how important student involvement in TWS is. The Wildlife Society has unique opportunities for students to mature professionally and engage with other professionals in their chosen field. These include student travel grants, the student research in progress poster sessions at the Annual Conference, state and section conferences, and most importantly, working groups. Working groups allow students to engage like-minded professionals and students, build relationships, learn, and grow in their field. When he's not working, he enjoys hunting, fishing, shooting sports, and snow sports.

## Resolve in the New Year

### Miranda Thompson and Christy Soldo

The idea of resolutions may seem antiquated to some, but I believe it's important to reflect on each passing year and what you want to make of the next. As a recent college graduate, I have a lot to reflect upon and a lot of goals to set as I embark on the first steps in my wildlife career. One goal I have set for myself is to be more active in the pursuit of my dream wildlife career. Being more proactive in achieving career and educational goals is a worthy pursuit for anyone reading this.

A career in wildlife biology is not for those who are tentative about achieving their goals. Becoming a wildlife professional requires a willingness to conduct field work and constant communication with professionals and peers. This year, aspiring wildlifers should be more active in reaching their career goals. They should reach out to desired professors whose research matches their interests. They should pay attention to details on job résumés and take the time to call the employer after applying. This hard work and dedication toward the field of wildlife biology will not go unnoticed by future employers.

Along with being more active in pursuing their personal careers, I would encourage all young wildlife professionals to be more

Allyssa Johnson volunteered on a black bear project in the Finger Lakes region of New York to gain experience.

involved in their communities. Volunteering with local hunting clubs, nature centers, or non-profits, such as the Sierra Club, will provide students with much-needed experience. Furthermore, students should attend public meetings or contact state representatives about issues relevant to wildlife habitat and natural resource use. As members of TWS, we are stewards for science, which makes our voices invaluable in our communities and our government.

Becoming a wildlife professional is not earned by sitting back and waiting for opportunities. Wildlife professionals are determined, passionate, and hard working. We are committed to our scientific values and are dedicated to bettering ourselves professionally. The students reading this newsletter are the future of wildlife biology. Therefore, they must be active in the pursuit of desired careers, committed to the continuation of research and development, and knowledgeable about political agendas and policies, so that together, we may provide the best environment for wildlife.



## Have Natural Resource Programs Surpassed Their Carrying Capacity?

**Phillip Stephenson**

As graduation creeps closer, or, for some, has passed, the looming question is, “What is next for me?” The surge of US Fish and Wildlife jobs in the last month has stopped some of the worry, but what will happen with the new administration? Can I find an assistantship? Are there any jobs in my home state? Will there be any upward mobility any time soon? These are some of the questions that we all play over and over in our minds as we try to plan our futures. The question that I have been pondering lately is, “Are we too saturated with natural resource graduates for the amount of jobs that currently exist?”

Now I am not saying more wildlife professionals is a bad thing, but I do want all of my peers to be able to acquire a job in our field. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 5,865 students received bachelor’s degrees in fields related to natural resources and conservation in 1993. By 2004 that number had grown to 8,797 students and in 2013 that number doubled to 16,510 students that graduated with bachelor’s degrees in natural resources. To put that into perspective, there are currently 21,300 jobs as zoologists/wildlife biologists in the United States according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#).

These numbers are troubling to me as they equate to replacing the entire job force with our recent graduates every 1.3 years. So now the question is, are we hurting our students by increasing our

enrollment in natural resource programs? Sure, we still have plenty of wildlife programs around the country that have small class sizes, but we also have a decent number of programs that are starting to have 24-60 students in each class. Those large class sizes can have effects on the learning experience of the students, while also hindering the logistics, such as how to take students on field trips for hands-on learning. I wonder if we should start being selective of whom we let into our programs, or if we will need to put a cap on the number of students we accept into natural resources and conservation programs. These are the criteria nursing and veterinary programs have put in place to limit the number of professionals in their fields. Is this the direction natural resource programs need to take in the future? That is a question for current and future administrators and professors to consider.

Now the good news: you are already ahead of your peers by being a member of The Wildlife Society, or at least a member of your student chapter of The Wildlife Society. You have gained experience with your chapters in outreach, fundraising, habitat manipulation, collecting biological data at deer check stations, interacting with the public, campus improvement projects, professional development, and networking. You have pursued internships and volunteer opportunities to set yourself above the rest. And though the road is unknown, you are unwavering in your pursuit of your perfect career. There will be jobs you dislike and there will be jobs you love, but they will both be just as important in molding you into the wildlife professional you will become.

*(continued on page 6)*

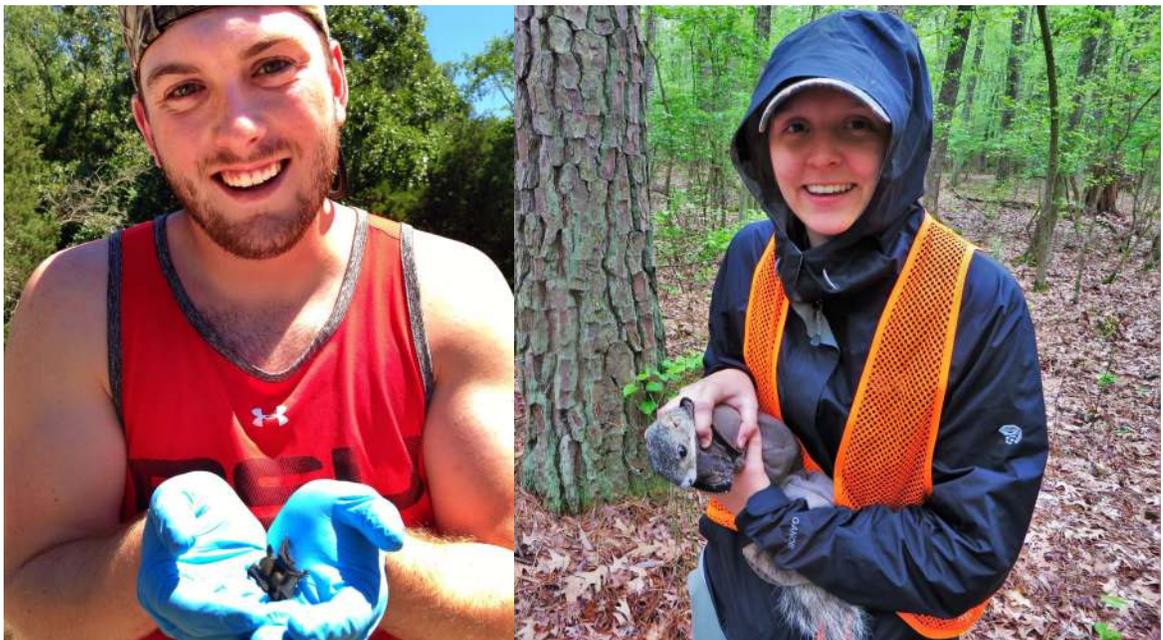
## Have Natural Resource Programs Surpassed Their Carrying Capacity?, continued

The road to a career just became rockier with the federal hiring freeze, but in the struggle, we become stronger professionals. There are still jobs for us, but they might not be as easy to see. We must broaden our search to incorporate research assistant and technician positions at universities, positions within non-profit organizations, state positions beyond natural resource agencies, and environmental consulting options. We cannot predict the future, but we can always make ourselves better and more competitive in the job market.

In the meantime, I recommend pursuing your [Associate Wildlife Biologist®](#) certification through The Wildlife Society. This certification quantifies your coursework and provides evidence that you can

represent the profession based on that coursework. The Associate Wildlife Biologist® certification also allows you to accelerate your Certified Wildlife Biologist® certification, which requires extensive coursework and working experience. Both are highly valuable and can set you apart from the other 16,510 natural resource graduates. In fact some state agencies will even give a 3% raise to Associate Wildlife Biologists® and another 3% raise to Certified Wildlife Biologists®. I received my Associate Wildlife Biologist® certification the fall after completing my bachelor's degree (2013) and it has proven beneficial. The best time to apply is immediately following graduation, when you can receive a discount on the application fee.

Landing your first internship or job might seem like a daunting task, but do not be discouraged. Keep pushing forward and the doors that were meant for you will be opened.



Work experience is one component of the Certified Wildlife Biologist® certification. Pictured: Andrew Byers (left) interned on an eastern small-footed bat project in southern Illinois and Laken Ganoe (right) assisted with a Delmarva fox squirrel project in Maryland.

## Update from TWS Headquarters

### An Introduction

#### Emily Ronis

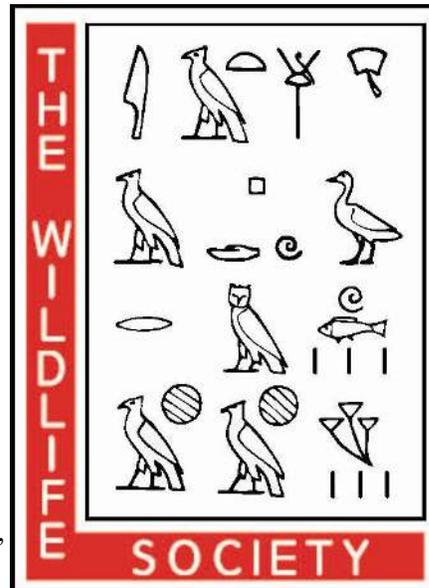
For many students, The Wildlife Society means weekly gatherings in a campus classroom, annual Conclaves, and the occasional state or national meeting. But many students don't often realize that in Bethesda, Maryland, there is a TWS headquarters staffed by dedicated, passionate, and unwavering individuals that work tirelessly to make those Conclaves, meetings, and the Society itself a reality. Whether you're a student interested in science writing, curious about wildlife policy, or want to follow the latest wildlife news, TWS headquarters can be a valuable resource for students and professionals alike:

#### Publications

[The Publications team](#) publishes two major publications: *The Journal of Wildlife Management* and *The Wildlife Professional*. TWS science writers also research, conduct interviews, and publish articles on the [TWS website](#). For anyone interested in science writing or wildlife news, the TWS Publications team has you covered.

#### Policy

The [TWS Government Affairs and Partnerships \(GAP\)](#) team aims to promote the use of science in wildlife-related policy decisions. GAP monitors proposed legislation, court cases, and regulations that affect wildlife and wildlife professionals, regularly attending meetings and hearings on Capitol Hill. The team also writes articles on the latest [wildlife policy](#) news for the TWS website. For students and professionals interested in learning more about policy,



explore the GAP webpage for fact sheets, policy briefs, a Policy Toolkit, and more resources.

The GAP team also offers a Wildlife Policy Internship program that introduces interns to

wildlife policy and the use of science in the decision-making process. See the [GAP webpage](#) for more information.

#### Operations

For many students, the TWS Annual Conference is a highlight of their year. Catching up with friends and colleagues, making new connections, gaining inspiration from plenaries, learning about the latest science – these and everything else that makes the Conference such a beloved event is made possible by the TWS Operations Team. They work tirelessly year-round to ensure attendees have the best possible experience, so be sure to thank them at [Albuquerque](#) this fall!

The staff at Headquarters also handle finances, member services, and all other tasks to ensure The Wildlife Society remains the leading voice on wildlife conservation. Follow The Wildlife Society on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to for the latest happenings in wildlife conservation.

We want to hear from you!



The Student Development Working Group has Facebook and Twitter pages where you can interact with the Board and other student members. Be sure to check us out!



## THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

*Leaders in Wildlife Science, Management and Conservation*



We would like to congratulate Undergraduate Student: Jason Matthews and Graduate Student: Colleen Hartel, winners of our travel grant to the 23rd Annual Wildlife Society Conference in Raleigh, North Carolina with Past Chair: Krysten Zummo and Current Chair: Kristi Confortin!

### Note from the Editor

Students,

The Student Development Working Group (SDWG) Newsletter Committee is working hard to bring you news from headquarters, the SDWG Executive Board, and each other. We are working to launch a forum within the newsletter where student chapters can interact with one another. In the meantime, if you have stories, photos, updates, and suggestions to share, please send them my way. Also, follow and interact with us on Facebook and Twitter for a chance to be highlighted!

Cheers,

Summer Higdon, SDWG Newsletter Committee Chair

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