

## **2022 Conservation Careers Informational Panel**

Hosted by the [Wisconsin Society for Conservation Biology-student chapter](#) at UW-Madison

### **Panelists:**

**Dr. Tim Van Deelen** received an M.S. in Wildlife Biology from the University of Montana and a Ph.D. in Wildlife Biology from Michigan State University. He has also had previous experience at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. He is currently a professor in the Department of Forest & Wildlife Ecology at UW-Madison whose research focuses on large mammals such as wolves and white-tailed deer.

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**Dr. Karie Cherwin** has an M.S. in Ecology from the University of Colorado – Boulder as well as a Ph.D. in Ecology from Colorado State University – Fort Collins. She is currently an Associate Lecturer & Outreach Specialist for the Forest & Wildlife Ecology Department and teaches Zoology 360: Extinction of Species.

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**Lindsey Taylor** graduated with a degree in Environmental Biology in 2017. She then spent four summers in Denali National Park, Alaska, interning with the National Park Service and working as a Field Educator for a local non-profit. In the winter seasons, she worked in Colorado and traveled in New Zealand before coming back to the Midwest to complete her M.S. Environmental Conservation professional graduate degree at the Nelson Institute at UW-Madison. Lindsey is now the Conservation Programs Coordinator at the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.

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**Jess Thompson's** path has led her from her first training experiences as a marine mammal intern with the US Navy, to tracking whooping cranes across the US for the International Crane Foundation, as well as roles in animal care, education, and conservation at the San Diego Safari Park and Cheyenne Mountain Zoo. As the Conservation Education Curator for Henry Vilas Zoo in Madison, Wisconsin, Jess gets to focus on the zoo's mission of saving wildlife and wild places, and inspiring others to do the same.

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**Catherine Woodward** is the President of the non-profit organization Ceiba Foundation for Tropical Conservation, as well as a Conservation Biology & Botany professor at UW-Madison. She leads three study abroad programs in Latin America: Water for Life, Tropical Conservation Semester, and Coral Reef Ecology.

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**Estaban Chiriboga** has a B.A. in Geography and Geology from Indiana State University and is currently an Environmental Specialist for the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC), working with projects on mining, piping, invasive species, and fish consumption issues.

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**Elizabeth Braatz** works for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources as the Bumble Bee Brigade Coordinator and Terrestrial Insect Ecologist. Elizabeth has a B.S. in Environmental Science, Policy, and Management from the University of Minnesota, a Masters in Entomology from the University of Florida, and five years of experience as a Conservation Technician for butterflies in Orlando, FL.

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## **General Q&A:**

### **What are important qualities to have or that you look for in graduate students?**

Dr. Van Deelen:

- Show commitment in things related to your field (leadership positions in clubs, internships, volunteering) rather than relying on good grades
- Be able to sell yourself and your skill set – utilize letters of recommendation by faculty members you are close to

Dr. Cherwin:

- Strive for a broad variety of different experiences, utilize the period right after completion of undergrad to move around and try new things

Thompson:

- Graduate degrees are not necessary for all zoo jobs, but having enough experience is very important
- Work on getting to know a lot of people and making connections

Woodward:

- Pursue what you truly want to do and are passionate about, rather than following prescribed path set by yourself or modeled after others
- If you follow your passions you're likely to do well, when you do well more doors open

Chiriboga:

- Working with tribes may be your first experience in the field, keep in mind recruiters are looking for people with a strong social justice and environmental justice drive, and look past the lower pay rates that sometimes accompany these positions

Braatz:

- Just keep trying and keep applying for more. Be open and say yes to opportunities even if they aren't exactly what you think you want to do
- Take advantage of UW-Madison's resources

### **Do you have any regrets or wish you had done anything differently leading up to now?**

Thompson:

- Conversely, never regretted saying yes and taking scary opportunities

Dr. Van Deelen:

- When thinking about forks in the road and directions not taken, you would have ended up being happy either way

- There are more opportunities available than you'll realize and sometimes you have to choose one thing over other things – take advantage of this resilience and choice as a young person

Dr. Cherwin:

- Regret not being confident as a young woman surrounded by older men in the field, and interpreting rejections/criticism in a discouraging manner

Braatz:

- Don't be a perfectionist about your career and timeline, things will change and you need to be flexible and go with the flow – on the same token don't compare your path/timeline to others because everybody has different experiences

### **What is your favorite piece of career advice to give?**

Taylor:

- Networking is so important – it's necessary to maintain positive connections and relationships
  - o An easy way to do this is by following up with professors, advisors, and former bosses and updating them on new developments in your career

Dr. Van Deelen:

- Undergraduate students have two important advantages: mobility and persistence
  - o Being mobile and open to opportunities across city/state lines dramatically increases your networks and connections early on in your career
  - o Be persistent to get what you want, don't be afraid to come off as annoying

### **How do you deal with hard/depressing aspects of a conservation-focused job?**

Thompson:

- "Compassion fatigue" is common in this field when you're dealing with heavy issues, especially things like animals in your care dying
  - o Self-care is very important: take small actions to make yourself feel good and surround yourself with people that are doing really cool stuff to feel inspired

Chiriboga:

- Experiencing burnout is common, and it's true that losses in this field of work can really hurt, don't be afraid to take time away from work, and have supportive people around you

Woodward:

- Sometimes it can feel as though you're swimming upstream against insurmountable forces
- Pairing conservation activities/projects with education for local people and students can be very rewarding because young people show so much hope and optimism

### **What would you deem the most important conservation issue today?**

Dr. Van Deelen:

- The climate crisis, hands down

Dr. Cherwin:

- Agreeing with Dr. Van Deelen, adding the lack of acknowledgement by the public that the climate crisis is a big deal (climate change deniers)

Woodward:

- Habitat loss facilitated by conversion of nature into human-dominated space

Chiriboga:

- Also climate change, adding that climate change threatens lands that we thought to already have protected

Braatz:

- Agreeing with Woodward (land use conversion), adding that constant human growth is at odds with maintaining functioning ecosystems

### **What are some things we can do to lessen our carbon footprint?**

Woodward:

- Utilize public transit, eat less meat, and buy electric vehicles when possible

Dr. Cherwin:

- Be mindful of how much you are consuming and how much waste your consumption generates

Dr. Van Deelen:

- Address systematic issues, easiest way to do this is by voting

Thompson:

- Use your buying power and ability to choose where your money goes to support conscious and sustainable producers

### **What are some good resources for undergraduate students?**

Dr. Van Deelen:

- [Usajobs.gov](https://www.usajobs.gov)
- [Texas A&M Natural Resources Job Board](https://www.texasaandm.edu/natural-resources/job-board)

Dr. Cherwin:

- [Nelson Institute Environmental Jobs](https://www.nelsoninstitute.org/environmental-jobs)

Taylor:

- [Conservationjobboard.com](https://www.conservationsjobboard.com)
- [Scientists in the Parks Internship Program](https://www.scientistsintheparks.org/programs/conservation-internship-program)

Braatz:

- [Wisconsin DNR Internships](https://www.wisconsin.gov/dnr/internships)
- [Student Conservation Association](https://www.studentconservation.org)
- [AZA](https://www.aazaweb.org)
- [USFWS Pathways Internships](https://www.usfws.gov/education/paths)

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