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Get to know conservation educator Lori Shoup



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When some Frankfort children visit Salato Wildlife Education Center, they may already recognize conservation educator Lori Shoup.

For three years, Shoup served as a conservation educator for the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, traveling to schools in several counties, including Anderson, Fayette, Jessamine, Scott, Woodford, Jefferson, Franklin and more. In Frankfort, she taught wildlife conservation at Westridge, Bridgeport and Elkhorn elementary schools and The Frankfort Christian Academy.

“A lot of the kids remember seeing me when they come to Salato, because I was their teacher at school,” Shoup said.

“I grew up with the parents of some of the kids. It was cool being back in my hometown teaching.”

Shoup is a 2007 graduate of Franklin County High School and a 2012 graduate of Western Kentucky University. She has a bachelor’s degree in biology. After college, she worked seasonally for Salato before accepting a position with the Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Foundation. She also worked as a lifeguard at the Frankfort YMCA.

In 2015, she was hired as a full-time conservation educator for KDFW. During the school year, she traveled to schools, and during the summer months she worked at Camp Earl Wallace on Lake Cumberland.

During the camps, Shoup taught children firearm safety, swimming, archery, outdoor survival, hunter education and more.

Last March, she was able to do a lateral transfer and became a full-time conservation educator at Salato.

State Journal: Why did you decide to get a degree in biology?

Shoup: In the movie “Office Space,” they ask the guy, “If you had a million dollars, what would you do?” And, that’s what you should be doing. If I had all the money in the world, I would play with animals all day.

SJ: Did you have animals growing up?

Shoup: I had hamsters and birds. I couldn’t have cats or dogs because my mom is allergic.

My first dog when I moved out of the house was a Chihuahua. Her name is Belle. I got her from L.I.F.E. House for Animals.

I still have Belle. I don’t have any other animals right now. I’ve had birds over the years. I had a yellow naped amazon, multiple parakeets and a cockatiel.

SJ: What did you like about working at the summer camps?

Shoup: It was great. There’s nothing more rewarding than working with the kids. I do miss it. I miss some of the fun things kids say, seeing kids get to do these things they wouldn’t normally get to do.

Working for the foundation, we raised money for scholarships for kids to get to go to the camps.

It was an experience. Some kids from rural counties knew what they were doing. Some of the inner-city kids didn’t know as much.

It's a rewarding experience to teach kids skills, especially lifesaving skills, such as the importance of wearing life jackets.

I now instruct CPR to KDFW staff. It's really rewarding to know you're potentially saving lives. I take it seriously and have a lot of pride in it.

It's also nice to teach kids about conservation and why hunting and fishing is so important to the environment.

SJ: What's a workday like for you at Salato?

Shoup: Today (March 12), for instance, I taught a reptile program. We teach programs to school groups when they come in. I also have to do an Owl Encounter. I do a lot of educating.

I'm in charge of the herps here — the snapping turtle and other turtles. I'm also in charge of the maintenance on the hiking trails and being a CPR instructor and certifying staff and keeping first aid up to date.

Overall, I just make sure guests have a positive experience and want to come back.

SJ: What animals are your favorite to work with at Salato?

Shoup: The groundhog, and I like bug collecting. I used to have an insect biodiversity collection. I had dragonflies, roaches, bees, wasps and flies.

SJ: Are there any animals at Salato that you don't like to handle?

Shoup: I don't have a hankering to go touch our venomous snakes. I really like insects and bugs. One of my favorite things to do is take nets down to the Dragonfly Marsh and collect bugs and let kids look at them.

SJ: What's your favorite part of the job?

Shoup: I really like working with kids. Kids and animals are where my passion is. I was a children's church teacher for 10 years in Georgetown at Grace Fellowship of Georgetown.

Knowing that you're going to work every day and potentially making a difference in someone's life. I remember coming to places like this as a kid and thinking it was the coolest thing. What I'm doing really matters.

SJ: When you're not at Salato, what do you like to do?

Shoup: I like to watch TV with my boyfriend. I like to play with my dog. I like to visit zoos. I like to collect zoo T-shirts.

I also like to go to Hanson concerts. I have a childhood friend, she's my Hanson buddy. If there's a concert within in driving distance, we're there. I met them when they did a meet-and-greet when I was 19 years old in Louisville. I cried and got them to sign my poster.

SJ: What kind of advice do you give someone looking to go into the biology field?

Shoup: Make sure you're doing it for the love of it. If you're doing what you love for work, then it's worth it.

Also, start volunteering. You can volunteer at Salato when you're 16 years old, and we have an internship for college students.

Volunteering here is a great way to get your foot in the door and get a feel for what it is like.

I volunteered here while I was in college. It was the coolest thing ever. I got to start working with really cool animals. It was like, "Wow – people get to do this for a living?"

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