

Via funding from the Arizona Community Foundation, Tucson Audubon Society has been participating in a Citizen Stewardship coalition to create portable programming to improve people's relationships with and understanding of our natural heritage, and in particular, animals, whether domestic or wild, and their habitat. During the past year, you have read many articles by the various agencies in the coalition, but until now, there has never been an article from the perspective of someone who has taken part in a citizen stewardship program. It is reassuring to know that our hard work over the past two years is resulting in engaged citizens who are becoming better stewards of the natural world.

Arizona Animal Welfare League's Teen Tracks

By Shelby Erdman

Originally, I was interested in becoming an Arizona Animal Welfare League (AAWL) Teen Tracker because I thought that it would look good on my college resume. I also thought it would be fun and interesting to help out at the shelter. Once I joined, I realized that Teen Tracks is so much more.

In Teen Tracks we help with many aspects of the shelter: socializing dogs and cats, as well as the many exotic animals, including ferrets, guinea pigs, a rabbit, a chinchilla, gerbils, rats, desert tortoises, hermit and fiddler crabs, a leopard gecko, giant African millipede, emperor scorpion, bark scorpion, bearded dragon, and Madagascar hissing cockroaches. We also help out the shelter by cleaning the dog yards, cattery, and exotics cages.

Teen Tracks has certain time obligations – you need to have a minimum of 24 hours logged per semester (6 typical Teen Tracks Shifts). I have been with Teen Tracks since fall 2005 and have logged over 400 hours. Teen Tracks meets every Saturday and almost every other Sunday.

Though we do many exciting things, my favorite is socializing with the animals. Nothing compares to sitting with a cat in your lap, playing fetch with one of the dogs, or having a giant African millipede crawl on your arm. Throughout the year, we participate in educational field trips to places like the Sonora Desert Museum, Arizona State University, and the Phoenix Zoo. I find these field trips very enjoyable.

A typical Teen Tracks shift includes cleaning up the shelter, taking a break for a snack, and spending time with the different shelter animals. On other days we take classes from Pet Behavior Solutions. The classes include things like dog behavior and body language, dog handling, and cat behavior and body language. Sometimes we have people from different organizations come talk to us, such as Any Rat Rescue.

Teen Tracks opened up a lot of opportunities that I would not have had otherwise. In Teen Tracks I have met many new friends that share similar interests. I have had opportunities to learn and practice leadership skills while assisting at Girl Scout workshops, and as a Junior Camp Counselor for AAWL's Camp Ruffin' It! program for kids ages 10-12 during the summer.

Teens should apply to become a Teen Tracker because they are helping out the shelter, they can meet many new friends, because it looks great on a college resume, and of course, because it's fun!

I now realize that Teen Tracks has exceeded my original expectations. I enjoy the work I do at the shelter so much that I almost never miss a weekend!