

What recent interns have said about their time at Stillman:

2012: From owl pellets to clumps of buckthorn, most would see merely care and maintenance, but every one of my tasks at Stillman has taught me more than I could ever imagine. Cleaning the raptor enclosures and handling the birds at Stillman has given me insight into each individual species' habits, diets, and behavior; as well as their background and history.

Watering transplanted trees along the trails has taught me what environments each species best thrives in, how they bud and grow, and how they cope with droughts, such as this summer's record-breaking dry season. And most importantly, helping Mark with newsletters, programs, and volunteers has taught me the value of what he likes to refer to as "people management," as well as the realities of running a nature center.

It's just not humanly possible to precisely manage all 80 stunning acres of Stillman's preserved land, but we do what we can. I have gained so much experience with controlling non-native plants and invasive species (or as I have decided to call them *highly adaptable*, after a long meeting with Illinois conservationists on the topic), and clearing the trails to keep them accessible for those who enjoy wandering the paths.

2014: Even before the summer began I was particularly interested in plants; this was further shaped and molded by my experience at Stillman. Often when I brought a species that eluded me to Mark for additional reference, he could not only identify it but had also written a newsletter about it in the past.

One of my favorite parts of the time I spent here was the changing of the seasons and the various tasks that came with it. Yes, I was only here for about three months but as anyone who has ever spent enough time outdoors will tell you, there are many seasons just within summer alone. For example, our first real daunting task was to clear patches of a seemingly endless sea of Garlic-Mustard, but by mid July this was not a duty anymore. The trails are brightened by different berries at different times.

Upon starting I was very restoration minded in thinking that it was worth making great efforts to restore everything to its "native" state. I came to realize that the world will never again be as it was in the early 19th century and trying too hard to make it so is disturbing nature in its own way. After all, who doesn't enjoy seeing the Chicory along side the trail?

Mark and Sue were the best employers I could have asked for, though I prefer to think of them as teachers. I really will miss hearing what needs to be done each day, I even might come to miss the ridiculous puns.

2015: Being a recent intern of Stillman it is only natural that I pass on advice to the next generation of interns. To start things off, when you are on the trails be sure to cut the plants and

branches from the base. By cutting from the base the plants won't grow back as fast and that's less time on the trails.

Another piece of advice, wear jeans, heavy garden gloves, and shirts you don't mind getting dirty. You will need the jeans and gloves for when you come head to head with multiflora rose and hawthorn. Make sure to put on bug spray when you go out on the trails for the early summer months or else you will find yourself crawling with ticks. Bug spray after this time period is unnecessary because as Mark would say "What mosquitoes? There are no mosquitoes here at Stillman."

Regarding the raptors the only advice I have to give is treat the birds with respect and they will respect you. By that I mean recognize their presence, read their mood, and don't make sudden movements that will make them uncomfortable. In the end, the birds' health comes way before your own. My last piece of advice is to make sure you ask Mark questions, especially questions about the plants and animals of the nature center. Trust me Mark will not be bothered...

2016 ...there were several occasions where I learned about nature the hard way, whether it be running into rose bushes and hawthorn trees or receiving blisters on my arms after a run-in with a patch of cow parsnip. Words such as "phytophotodermatitis" now had a much more personal meaning as opposed to being a simple vocabulary word. However, it's these types of experiences that really make the internship so special to me. These are things they can't teach you in class. You can see as many pictures of animals and flowers as you want, but you never fully experience or learn about nature until you see it with your own eyes. For me, this was the most important thing that I learned ..., that experience is the best resource you have for learning about a specific field.

2017: I can say this was one of the best summers I have had in a long time, despite most of it being spent working. ...when I first came to Stillman ... the majority of the time was spent doing a rather hefty amount of trail trimming—or, as we came to call it, a bit of botanical assassination. Over time I learned to identify many of the wild flora that grows in the nature center; which ones I was meant to leave alone and which ones I had the go-ahead to take out with no mercy. Even now I still find myself inadvertently identifying plants I see on the side of the road as I recognize them from my time at Stillman. I may have also developed a particular fondness for fresh mulberries, one of Stillman's most readily available mid-summer snacks...

... the sweeping knowledge and experience captured throughout this job is irreplaceable. From repetitious humor to ungodly stench and discomfort, the center, and its curator, offered an abundance of lesson and legacy. The spectrum of lectures and teachings varied from topics of zoology, forestry, entomology, botany, along with discussion of current events and exchanges of tales. This compilation of wisdom and entertainment personified an odd and unique experience that is itself, the Stillman Nature Center.

2019: Stillman is a perfect example of finding beautiful, mostly undisturbed wildlife right in your backyard. You don't need to travel far and wide to see nature. Stillman is tucked in a suburban neighborhood, but that's hard to believe when you are walking down a narrow path

through the woods and walk out into a prairie or next to a cattail marsh. I used to think the “best” nature had to be pristine and completely undisturbed, which I knew was both uncommon and unlikely to find. I can now appreciate that humans are allowed to go into an area, feel close to wildlife, and see/hear/feel things that they can’t in a developed area. Isn’t it important for people to experience something firsthand if they are going to care about it? Seeing nature from a paved path is a totally different experience than going down a gravel/woodchip path and feeling engulfed in the woods.

When clearing buckthorn for the first time...Sue (one of the bosses) called out that there was a garter snake slithering around in the tall grass near the pond. We all simultaneously dropped our loppers and bowsaws and ran to the edge of the pond. Afterwards it became the joke that while most people would run away from a wild snake, Stillman Interns run towards it.