

My Shanwell Experience

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My partner, Louise, and I moved to Dundee in August 2007. Shortly after settling, we searched for somewhere to volunteer our time that would allow us both to pursue one of our passions – working with animals.

We first contacted the SSPCA, expecting to receive an appreciative response. Instead, we were informed that we would be placed on a waiting list among countless other volunteers with a similar interest in working with animals. We were aware that there was a branch of Cats Protection in the area, but did not want to limit our involvement to only one species.

After a quick google search for animal welfare organisations in the area, we stumbled upon a link to Shanwell Wildlife Rescue Trust. A quick look around the website revealed information about foxes, swans, seals, rabbits and many other animals that had been the recipients of care from Shanwell. And best of all, they were looking for volunteers! This seemed like the perfect place to devote our time and gain hands on experience with a variety of animals. We quickly downloaded volunteer application forms, sent them away with our membership fee and waited patiently by the phone for the call.

Soon after, we were invited to a group meeting where we learned about the work Shanwell had been doing to help sick and injured wildlife in the Dundee and Tayside area. We heard stories of stranded whales, a swan stuck in a fence, water fowl that had been wounded by discarded fishing line, animals that were victims of road traffic accidents and many more exciting and unfortunate cases that had benefited from Shanwell's care. Without so much as a second thought, we committed ourselves to get involved and help out in any way needed.

A week later, our first visit to the unit was an eye opening experience in many ways. After hearing about so many thrilling wildlife rescues, we were expecting to find a purpose-built, state-of-the-art medical facility buzzing with animal medics, full of wild and critical patients in need of immediate hands-on care.

After travelling to a wind-swept corner of Broughty Ferry, we entered a medium sized room that contained three reasonably healthy but grumpy hedgehogs in the care of a small handful of dedicated volunteers who all pitched in and helped out whenever possible alongside their day jobs. It was a bit of a contrast to our expectations, but still an exciting environment nonetheless.

It was clear the unit was ready for action. Everything was labelled and tucked away in easy to reach locations around the room with procedures in place, should any emergency situation arise and a critical patient need immediate attention. It was evident that the well organised centre could accommodate any emergency situation sufficiently, but would also benefit greatly from the availability of additional funds to allow for improving the facilities and equipment.

We returned home from our first night at Shanwell, ready and poised for action should we receive the call to attend to sick or injured animals. Little did we know, those prickly hedgehogs would be the only wildlife we would come in contact with for the next few months.

It was a quiet winter, with few calls needing any more than one responder. This downtime allowed us the chance to grow in our knowledge of the possible wildlife needing assistance while deepening our connection to Shanwell as an organisation.

The coming spring has brought with it more chances for Louise and me to gain more hands on experience with wildlife. We've also gotten involved in fundraising efforts to help the organisation continue to care for the animals as well as take steps to grow closer to what one day may become the state-of-the-art rescue facility I imagined. We have helped organise several fundraising events taking place this spring and hope to see the fruits of these efforts materialise in the coming months.