

[from Fall 2007]

**Making the Most of Summer: A Summer Internship Experience at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge** by Erin Eberstein, 2007 Environmental Education Intern

I find myself reminiscing about the “good ol’ days.” A time when recess was still a planned portion of my day and a three month break from school was a guarantee. However, it seemed like only mere days before I woke up in my freshman year of college, only a month before I began my first summer in the “real” world. This “real” world was only a small glimpse into my future, and I had endless options on how I could spend these months. Many college students choose an internship, like me, not because it sounds fun or necessarily pays well, but because it offers something that can never be bought: experience.

On May 12<sup>th</sup>, I met Chincoteague Island for the first time and a day later I met Assateague Island. Since that moment it became my home, and the people there became my temporary family. At first, I and six other summer interns all found ourselves seemingly alone on an island full of strangers. However, soon enough we became inseparable, spending every waking moment together. Adjusting to a new way of life seemed easy for everyone, and before long we all found our own niche in the group. Jeremy would become the “smart” one, the person that always seemed to know the answers, yet had a joke to replace every one. Amy would become our own photographer for the summer, catching every great and not-so-great moment on camera. Charlotte, our own little hippie vegetarian, would soon come out of her shell. Everyone’s favorite Tennessee girl, Jessica, would soon defy personal boundaries. With his chuckling laugh, Bret would teach us all the real meaning of the phrase, “Don’t worry; be happy.” And to keep us all in check, Claire never failed to let us know when we were getting out of hand. From tipping over boats in the bay, to spending hours on the beach, to having jam sessions in the trailer, we all had an amazing time outside of the workplace. However, once our khaki shirts were donned for the day we all became interns, some with a passion for animals, others with the determination to educate the public about the importance of places like our refuge. Biology interns soon found out what a hot summer day really was and how to use binoculars to spot piping plovers, “cotton ball” sized birds, on the beach. Others, like Bret and me, would learn more about kids, and how to interact with the public more than we could ever imagine.

Children in the Woods Day Camp was one of the most rewarding experiences of my time here as an intern. I came to Chincoteague as a Virginia Tech forestry student, wanting to learn more, and I did; not only about what I needed to know, but also what I thought I would never need to know. I had many exceptional teachers along the way, some my peers, others my supervisors. Laurel Wilkerson not only taught me about the facets of environmental education, but also gave me the opportunity to experience all areas and jobs that the refuge had to offer. Together we tackled groups of children from local area elementary schools to high schools, teaching about everything the natural world and Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge has to offer. She also showed me how to be a professional employee and how to deal with everyday situations with grace. Becky

Wolff, with whom I spent the majority of my workday, introduced me to planning and hard work when she asked me to assist with the Children in the Woods Day Camp.

So, all in all, this summer proved to be an amazing learning experience for all the interns, providing all of us with more knowledge and experience for our professional futures. Not only have we learned a little bit about ourselves and our fellow interns, but we have also made experiences to last a lifetime. On behalf of all the interns, I would like to thank Chincoteague Natural History Association and everyone from Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge for an unforgettable summer.