

F24.037 NAU Gartersnake Research Program: Experiential Learning in Threatened Species Conservation

Overview

The NAU Gartersnake Program includes scientists, students, and volunteers working together with state, federal, and private partners to assist with recovery of federally Threatened northern Mexican (*Thamnophis eques megalops*) and narrow-headed (*T. rufipunctatus*) gartersnakes. Research includes captive husbandry of narrow-headed gartersnakes, distribution and monitoring surveys, biomonitoring, and analyses of historic data from telemetric and ecological studies.

What the student will DO and LEARN

An IS2 scholar in our program will learn basic scientific principles and practices, with a focus on strong communication, precise data recording, developing personal responsibility in the workplace, and professionalism, skill sets that are critically important for scientists. While working with federally listed species in the NAU gartersnake research program, students will assist with data entry, sample collection and preparation, record keeping, captive gartersnake and fish husbandry and facility maintenance while following strict biosecurity procedures, social media communications, and/or field surveys if schedules allow. During the second semester of working with us, students may wish to develop an independent research project based on historic data analyses, captive animal observations, and/or analyses of captive facility environmental data.

Additional benefits

Students in this program benefit from all aspects of real-world experiential learning focused on real-world conservation. We work closely with multiple state and federal regulatory agencies to ensure that animals are not harmed during our work, and this fosters learning of precision in data recording, attention to detail in conducting routine chores, dealing effectively with unexpected crises that require immediate attention, and also provides networking opportunities for especially motivated students. Rather than this being a low-stakes, 9-5 kind of job, we especially like working with students who approach their work with dedication and a willingness to go above and beyond. Several previous volunteer interns have commented that the program provides a uniquely supportive yet challenging learning environment which fosters diversity and inclusion, and that they've felt particularly rewarded for their dedication to conservation. They love that they are making a difference to animal lives while supporting long-term species recovery research.

Additional qualifications

- Available to work in person during 5-hour blocks of time during the week and on some weekends
- Attention to detail and ability to independently follow strict instructions and complicated protocols (more important than animal experience!)
- Strong written and verbal communication skills, including daily email checking
- Ability to lift 30 pounds
- This position is partially-funded by NAU's LSAMP program, so acceptance to this position is contingent upon LSAMP-eligibility

- Time and devotion: willingness to volunteer time if crises arise, to ensure animal health and safety
- Interns must successfully complete extensive animal care training before starting work with live animals
- To protect animal and co-worker health, we currently follow COVID-19 precautions including wearing masks and monitoring symptoms.

Time commitment

8 hrs/week for 15 weeks