

FLORIDA CHAPTER THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Non-governmental Organization (NGO) Special Recognition Award

The Florida Chapter of The Wildlife Society is pleased to announce that the **South Florida Wildlife Center** is the recipient of the 2024 NGO Special Recognition Award.



The South Florida Wildlife Center (SFWC) is the highest-volume wildlife hospital in Florida admitting between 10,000-12,000 animals each year. Founded in 1969, for 53 years, SFWC has served a vital role not only in Broward County and its residents, but also in the Tri-county area and the entire State of Florida. Since its inception, the SFWC has helped approximately 6.5 million animals coming through their Trauma hospital, and millions of residents and good Samaritans that sought their help. Their mission to rescue, rehabilitate and release injured and orphaned wildlife, and to share information about wildlife issues with the public at large has endured over five decades, having a lasting impact on our community and the people we serve. Their facility in Fort Lauderdale is centrally located in the service area of Broward with 75% of the people and animals annually

helped from Broward, and the remaining 25% from Palm Beach and Miami Dade counties and the State.

They offer advice and assistance to 60,000 concerned Broward residents each year who contact them to help with injured/orphaned animals and resolve their wildlife issues with the proper coaching from their expert staff. They offer training, conduct innovative research, and ensure those handling wildlife are well-equipped for any situation. Their partnership with law enforcement and other public offices continues to strengthen

regional response and the capacity to respond to wildlife conflicts. They also conduct many free educational outreach events and presentations including our “MEET YOUR WILDLIFE NEIGHBORS” workshops held monthly at local nature centers and parks. In addition, monthly webinars/virtual classes, presentations at local camps, workshops for homeowner associations, schools, and libraries are provided at no charge.

Their cumulative community outreach efforts provide education to more than 70,000 Broward residents each year. In 2021, SFWC attended 76 large and small public venues to provide educational experiences and engagement for all ages. Since January 2022, they have interacted with over 9,000 community members at their bi-monthly “Wild Talks” in various parks and have conducted 47 educational engagements in local elementary schools.

In 2021, the SFWC recognized the need to educate and promote respect and appreciation of nature by teaching children, families, Homeowners Associations, Colleges, Universities, and community members that they can peacefully co-exist with their wildlife neighbors. With that goal, the Center obtained a State permit for Ambassador animals for non-releasable species to further educate the community on the importance of wildlife. These animals are permanent residents of the SFWC due to their various conditions that prevent them from returning to the wild. With the help of their 11 Ambassador Animals, they launched a new program: "Rollin' on the Wildside". This program brings their ambassadors to classrooms, outreach events, and public venues. It teaches the principles of environmental conservation through fun, innovative, and interactive education activities customized towards the respective audiences. They serve to educate the public about the species and provide up-close encounters with children and Broward residents who have never had the opportunity to meet and touch such animals. These ambassador animals love to travel to local schools and events and promote respect and appreciation of nature so that everyone can better understand how they can peacefully co-exist with their wildlife neighbors.

The SFWC has been part of the Broward Community for over 54 years. They are open to the public 365 days, 7 days a week, and they offer their services free of charge to the community. Because of the longevity and reputation of the organization, the support and generosity of the Broward residents, members of the public in general, and private Foundations have been at the core of their successful fundraising efforts to continue their mission. They have partnered with organizations like Publix, Whole Foods, the Community Foundation, Broward County Schools, Broward County Parks, City College, University of Miami, the City of Fort Lauderdale, and many more. These partnerships allowed them to increase their social media presence by 300% and develop a loyal following on media channels (YouTube, TikTok, Facebook, Instagram). SFWC also created monthly and quarterly newsletters to keep their donors informed, and actively started to engage Broward residents and local media in their wildlife releases. They have created new innovative programs to involve residents besides volunteering with the organization: “Donate your backyard”, “Volunteer for a Day”, “Wildlife Rescuer”, to name a few. These new innovative programs involving the public more directly, has resulted in sustainable support and resources for the Center.

SFWC is a model for other organizations since they rescue and rehabilitate every animal that needs them, while they educate each member of the community they interact with. Additionally, they are shaping the future of wildlife veterinarian medicine globally. SFWC treats over 350 different species every year and offers highly sought-after practical experience for veterinary interns and externs worldwide. They provide lodging and hands-on experience at no cost to the students. Their unique Veterinary Program initiated over 18 years ago, has hosted over 397 interns and externs from Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, Spain, Taiwan, and the United States. Their waiting list is currently two years. As in the nomination letter, "Community service, overall impact on the community and the lives of those they serve, and stellar results, makes the SFWC worthy of the Award."