

Wildlife Rehabilitator  
West Sound Wildlife Shelter  
Bainbridge Island, WA

**Wildlife Rehabilitator VocationVacations®  
dream job holiday with Mike Pratt**

Does the sight of an injured wild animal make you feel something beyond empathy? Do you wish you could help wildlife thrive, especially when it's threatened by human actions? Could you imagine yourself in a job where satisfaction meant seeing a healed osprey fly free, or nursing an abandoned baby raccoon to health? If you found yourself nodding enthusiastically as you read these questions, you may be ready to travel to Bainbridge Island, Washington, for a VocationVacations® dream job holiday as a wildlife rehabilitator with West Sound Wildlife Shelter.

As Director of Wildlife Services at West Sound, Mike Pratt has made a profession from a lifetime love. "I have always had a strong interest in wildlife ever since I was a child," says Mike. "As an adult, I worked other jobs—firefighting, emergency medical technician, and park ranger. I also worked in a hospital and volunteered at a local wildlife center." At one point, however, Mike realized that what he truly desired was a career working with wildlife. "That was what I enjoyed in my heart, so I decided to focus my college studies on that field and make that my career focus," he says. "In addition to my full-time work at the hospital, I volunteered at a wildlife shelter and a raptor sanctuary on my days off until I got a full time job at a wildlife center. I have been working with wildlife full-time since 1992 and love it!"

Working at West Sound Wildlife Shelter gives Mike the opportunity to interact not only with animals, but also with people, educating them on how they can be better stewards of the environment. "Wildlife rehabilitation is a tool to teach people about wildlife and nature, a resource to spot wildlife and ecological problems as they arise, and compensation to the wild animals we negatively affect by giving them a second chance at freedom." While all of these factors make Mike's job important, there are specific aspects that he considers particularly worthwhile. "When a child comes away knowing how to return a baby bird to the nest, a person removes a hazard to a wild animal, or when the joy is reflected in the eyes of those who watch a bird go free—then wildlife rehabilitation has been successful," he says. "To me, rehabilitation also provides rewards when once-injured or sick wild animals are released and given that second chance to join the wild populations!"

Mike notes that being a wildlife rehabilitator requires a special kind of commitment. "Treating distressed wild animals and interacting with the people that find them can be very stressful and time consuming at times. A rehabilitator must be prepared to spend less time with family and friends in the busy seasons, experience animal suffering and death, and experience the danger associated with handling wild animals," he says. Mike adds that early specialization and a fundamental understanding of wildlife are critical to succeeding in the job. "A person considering this as a career should choose one species

of animal to become an expert on care and rehabilitation, in the beginning, to prevent from becoming overwhelmed. A rehabilitator must always remember that they must keep the animals wild; they are not pets, and this can be very hard for some people. The top priority *must* always be to return the animals to the wild.” Finally, Mike says that patience is an important skill to exercise, especially when dealing with the public. “A rehabilitator is both an educator and a healer. You must teach the public ways to share the planet with the animals, ways to reduce injuries to the animals, and natural history of the animals, in addition to the rehabilitation tasks.”

Despite “seeing the needless death of wild animals and how humans negatively affect the wildlife that we share this planet with,” Mike finds that working in wildlife rehabilitation ultimately bolsters his optimism. “Watching the successfully rehabilitated wild animal return to the wild makes up for the difficult times,” he says. “I want to do my part in protecting nature, to make right what has been made wrong, and to teach others how to live with nature so that future generations will have wildlife to enjoy and a healthy earth to live upon.”

Developing a broader, more interconnected picture of human ecological relationships is one of the most gratifying aspects of Mike’s job, one he enacts every day and shares through education. “We, as individuals, can make a difference,” he says. “But we must first realize that we are all part of the web and learn to live with nature one animal at a time.”

**While on your Wildlife Rehabilitator VocationVacations® dream job holiday with Mike Pratt, activities will include some or all of the following:**

- Assist the Director of Wildlife Services with giving medical treatments to wild animals
- Prepare the daily diets for wild animals in the hospital
- Clean and maintain enclosures used to house rehabilitating wild animals
- Build natural habitats in enclosures that will house rehabilitating animals
- Organize the equipment that is used in the hospital’s daily activities
- Hand-feed baby animals including mammals and birds (this activity generally happens in the spring and early summer only)
- Assist the rehabilitation staff with office duties related to volunteer organization and management
- Learn about wildlife rehabilitation techniques
- Participate in the management and training of live educational birds, including the shelter’s great horned owl

**The Wildlife Rehabilitator VocationVacations® holiday at West Sound Wildlife Shelter includes:**

- Two days of one-on-one mentorship in your dream job as a wildlife rehabilitator

- A VocationVacations® journal so you can document your dream job coming to reality!
- A total of one hour of pre- & post-VocationVacations® life and career strategy coaching via phone from a VocationVacations®-affiliated life/career coach
- Lunches

**Available:** Based on mentor's availability

**Price:** \$999 per person

**Suggested Accommodations:**

Best Western  
350 NE High School Road  
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110  
866-396-9666  
[www.bestwestern.com/bainbridgeislandsuites](http://www.bestwestern.com/bainbridgeislandsuites)

Eagle Harbor Inn  
291 Madison Ave. S.  
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110  
206-842-1446  
[www.theeagleharborinn.com](http://www.theeagleharborinn.com)