

Dr. Cindy Driscoll is currently the State Fish and Wildlife Veterinarian for the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Her office is located in Oxford, MD at the Cooperative Oxford Laboratory. She also has taught Wildlife Diseases at the University of Maryland main campus in College Park, MD for 20 years. Her background and thoughts on a career in wildlife veterinary medicine, teaching, and government service are below.



“What a long, strange trip it’s been....”

Pre-history

As a young woman in high school on the Eastern Shore of Maryland my career path was uncertain at best – even bleak. I was told by my high school guidance counselor to forget any attempt at college and be happy with women’s purpose in life – to have babies. His name was Mr. Hope (how ironic is that?). To figure out what I really wanted to do I asked to take a vocational test that matches your answers to those of successful people in known professions. When my result was matched to “veterinarian” Mr. Hope said that it must be wrong *since women could not be veterinarians*. He insisted that I take the test a second time. When “veterinarian” was again the result – he said “well – *YOU must have done something wrong* on the test – just be a secretary and be happy with your lot in life”. I now refer to him as Mr. “Hopeless” (since he probably crushed the hopes of many female students).

College Years

I went to college and got a degree in education, but found that pursuit unrewarding. For the next ten years I put my husband through school – getting his masters and Ph.D. degrees in psychology and realized that I would not be happy if I did not pursue my dream of a career in veterinary medicine. During our moves to Baltimore and Mississippi for his graduate work I took pre-veterinary courses along the way. Once we had a stable income I began gaining experience for my application to vet school. I worked for small and large animal vets and even at a dairy farm, and loved every job, but when I inquired about working at a local research facility to get even more experience – I discovered it was actually research with endangered species for the USFWS. I began working as a caretaker for the Endangered Species Branch at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center – (Whooping cranes, Bald eagles, Andean condors). From the first day at PWRC I knew that a career in conservation and wildlife veterinary medicine would be my career path. I applied and was admitted at VMRCVM.

Veterinary School

During vet school no wildlife work existed since most research was funded by small and large animal feed and drug companies. I was fortunate to be awarded a fellowship in avian toxicology and completed two years working with veterinary school professors to counter the effects of aflatoxin in poultry feed. That experience has enhanced my knowledge of birds and toxicology.



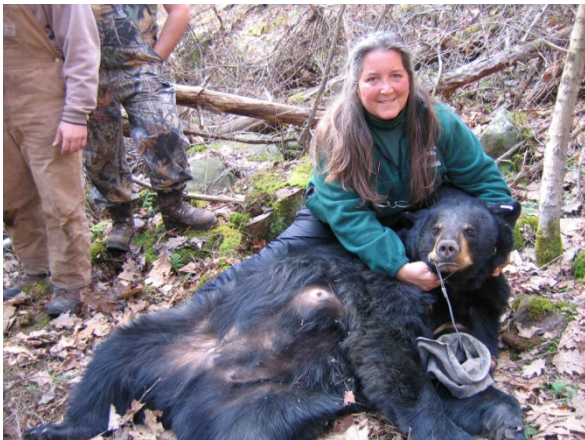
Amazing Jobs

My first job as the veterinarian and laboratory supervisor for a wildlife toxicology facility was as a direct result of my research experience in veterinary school. After deciding to have a baby – I left the full-time tox job and worked on four contractual positions – Patuxent Wildlife Research Center – Relief Veterinarian, Maryland Department of Natural Resources Aquatic Scientist, Toxicology Laboratory Consultant, and as a Clinical Instructor for Wildlife Diseases at the University of Maryland. While working for the MD DNR – I collaborated with the U.S. Department of Commerce National Marine Fisheries Service Northeast Region to develop the first Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Stranding Program for the Mid-Atlantic region. Since no veterinary training existed with these species – I gained handling, medicine and necropsy experience from many sources, but particularly with the Smithsonian Institution Division of Mammals experts, and also from researchers at the Virginia Aquarium and the College of William and Mary School of Marine Studies Sea Turtle Research Program.

From there I was fortunate to secure a position as the first marine mammal veterinarian for the US Department of Commerce, National Marine Fisheries Service, Office of Protected Resources at the NOAA headquarters in Silver Spring, MD. For the next six years – I developed that position for our office, advised researchers on scientific project proposals, consulted with public display facility veterinarians, and worked with stranding networks to begin development of operational standards and necropsy protocols. It was a great position, but very far from where I lived on the eastern shore of MD. So I began exploring the possibility of working closer to home and eventually created the position as the first Fish & Wildlife Veterinarian for the State of Maryland. Since 1999 I established the MD DNR Fish & Wildlife Health Program and have wonderful young enthusiastic biologists working for me. We work closely with other Maryland agencies – Departments of Agriculture, Health, and Environment to address fish and wildlife health and disease concerns.

Affiliations and Current Work

I'm overcommitted and underpaid.... (or perhaps I should say – "I SHOULD be committed") but I enjoy working with professional organizations like AAZV and AAWV – and in recent years volunteered to chair the AAWV Wildlife Session at NAVC and reviewed entries to the new AAZV Infectious Disease Manual.



I am currently working on a number of interesting projects for MD DNR and other professional organizations – and some of them are listed below:

- Implementing the Mid-Atlantic Zoonotic and Vector-Borne Disease Working Group - an interagency working group to address zoonotic diseases for state and federal agriculture, wildlife and public health agencies in our region
- Developing and implementing the new Maryland One Health Bulletin for state licensed and accredited veterinarians
- Participating on many other MD DNR task forces and committees (CWD, HAB, etc.)

- Analyzing results on a black bear health assessment and disease project with the Maryland Zoo
- Investigating White-Nose Syndrome in Maryland bat populations including a metagenomics study to determine viral exposures
- Summarizing contaminants research on stranded marine mammals in Maryland
- Beginning an endangered species Section 6 project with Virginia biologists to explore sea turtle health, pathology and diet preferences for the Chesapeake Bay
- Continuing with research on Avian Influenza with Ohio State researchers; and with USDA on West Nile Virus research
- Investigating striped bass mycobacterial disease and sturgeon health in the Chesapeake Bay
- Working with wildlife rehabilitators and the USGS/ NBII Wildlife Disease Information Node to enhance online data reporting of disease events
- Providing guidance to US DOC /NMFS on the Atlantic Large Whale take Reduction Team
- Serving on the Board of Directors for the State Animal response Team – representing MD DNR and wildlife
- Teaching young veterinary students while on faculty for [MarVet](#) and [AquaVet](#) – aquatic veterinary training programs
- Providing guest lectures and necropsy labs for the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine
- Mentoring and advising students and employing at least 2 undergraduates each summer – some of which have been in a pre-vet curriculum and have entered veterinary schools; and providing externship experience for senior veterinary students
- Providing journal article reviews for several wildlife and veterinary journals
- Working with the Wildlife Disease Association Teller Committee – monitoring elections and advising on current issues; and previously participated in the Long-term Vision and Student Activities committees
- Working as the Membership Chair for the International Association for Aquatic Animal Medicine
- Participating on a top security clearance federal advisory group to address international terrorism and biological threats to the U.S.



Thoughts – My Two Cents....

I hope that most of what I attempt to do contributes to the field of wildlife health and disease research. Encouraging wildlife biologists and managers to look at wildlife from a disease and health perspective is part of my job. These folks are willing participants in sampling and necropsy workshops, and eager to increase their knowledge bases for the animals in their charge.

Additionally, my love of working in the field of wildlife disease research is enhanced by educating and nurturing young professionals in our field and helping them to appreciate natural resources and the world around them. These young people bring new fresh approaches to wildlife issues and will be the future of our profession.

From my perspective the most challenging issue is funding for all types of wildlife disease work – especially long-term studies. The reactive nature of approaches to wildlife disease is fundamental to most agencies. Proactive and long-term research is often sacrificed for the “problem of the day”. States are suffering from loss of staffing positions and budget cuts. Monies are limited currently, but hopefully will increase with a recovering economy.

My career has been a long and winding road, with a non-traditional pathway and definitely interesting and amazing projects. The best part of my job is the flexibility it allows for fieldwork, management involvement, teaching and being able to handle it all with a family. My terrific husband, John, and my incredible daughter, Caitlin, have been with me every step of the way over the years and continue to support my career. I learn something new every day working with wonderful spectrum of unique animals and each day I discover something new about health, disease, or management issues concerning natural resources. I hope to to pass along knowledge to young veterinarians and to provide fertile ground for the growth of our profession.