

## An interview with ANSC Major Rachel Haynes regarding her Tiger Creek Wildlife Refuge Experience

*(Texas, Summer 2011)*



*This is my absolute favorite picture with my boy Accolon, Bengal Tiger*

They are here and not out in the wild. Many of the cats at Tiger Creek were rescued from local households that clearly did not understand that cute tiger cubs turn into 400 pound tigers. There are also cats retired from entertainment such as Ringling Brothers Circus and Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch. Each intern also got to train 2 cats. I trained Accolon, a

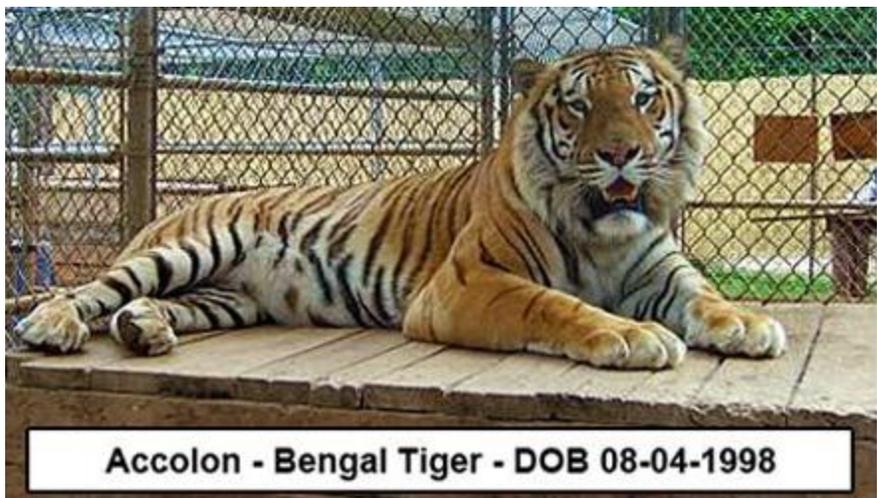
**Q: Where did you intern, and when?**

I interned at Tiger Creek Wildlife Refuge in Tyler Texas, this past summer 2011.

**Q: Was it a paid internship? What did you do there?**

It was unpaid. I preformed all the basic care of 43 exotic cats. There were 30 tigers, 5 lions, 2 leopards, and 2 bobcats. Myself and 5 other interns worked 6 days of the week from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., with little work on Sundays in a rotation.

We would prepare raw beef and chicken for the cats each morning and clean cages throughout the day. We also gave tours to the public and educated people about where these cats came from and why



**Accolon - Bengal Tiger - DOB 08-04-1998**

male Bengal tiger and Ngala, a female African Lion. We did training from outside the fence with meat on the end of a stick. Interns teach commands like Sit, Rise, Paw, Open, and Down. All the commands are used to evaluate the



health of the cat on a daily basis and help during vet calls so we don't have to always put the cat out. We can check how steady their legs are when using the "Rise" command and observe alignment of their spine in the "Sit" and "Down" commands. We can also administer oral medications during the "Open" command.

The animal care and maintenance staff are all amazing people and work tirelessly to give these animals a fantastic life. They are currently expanding and redeveloping the habitats and always have something new and exciting happening. One word of warning before applying, it gets HOT in Texas in the summer. There were 40 days straight over 100 degrees while I was there and we were all out there cleaning, giving tours, and working hard. You'll always have a sweat rag and a water bottle attached to you and you will probably have 1 day where you will feel like you're going to pass out, but it's all for the cats! Plus, when you hose them down there's no shame in cooling yourself down too.

**Q: When did you apply for this internship?**

I applied in January for the summer term but they offer terms all year around.

Winter Term: November 14th - February 13th (Application Deadline August 1st each year)

Spring Term: February 13th - May 15th (Application Deadline November 1st each year)

Summer Term: May 15th - August 14th (Application Deadline February 1st each year)

Fall Term: August 14th - November 14th (Application Deadline May 1st each year)

**Q: How long did the internship last?**

The internship lasted 90-days.

**Q: How did you learn about this opportunity?**

I learned about it through an internet search for exotic animal sanctuaries or refuges.

**Q: Anything else you'd like to add about your experience?**

This experience DOES NOT provide any direct contact with the cats. You won't be cuddling up with any of them or scratching their ears through the cages. This is a safety issue that is non-negotiable with Tiger Creek. Many of these cats are playful and friendly. They will come up to the fence and rub on it and make their 'happy sound' called a "chuff", but if you were to start scratching them and they moved along the fence they could trap and break your fingers simply with their large size. They are 400 lb playmates that can completely be enjoyed and interacted with from a distance. It's hard but very worth it to keep you fingers to yourself.



Tiger Creek welcomes all majors to apply; they've had a variety of majors such as Journalism and Photography. You just need to love animals.

**Q: What is your area of interest as an ANSC major?**

I am interested in large animal, both farm and exotic.

**Q: So, what are your plans when you graduate?**

I plan to go to vet school with the help of the knowledge and experience I gained at Tiger Creek.

**Q: If someone has questions, can they contact you regarding your internship experience?**

If anyone wants to know more they can email me at [Rachel.Haynes@uconn.edu](mailto:Rachel.Haynes@uconn.edu). I also have a million photos if they want to see what we did. The website is also [www.tigercreek.org](http://www.tigercreek.org) for more info.