

# MIZZOU

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## Around the Columns

### On the wild side of internships

As Jeffrey Wiegert drove down Interstate 35 into St. Paul, Minn., he noticed a 3-foot alligator riding shotgun. Quickly, he pulled into a fast-food parking lot and secured the gator in the insulated bin from which it had escaped. The think-on-your-feet experience wasn't an anomaly during his summer 2010 internship at the Reptile & Amphibian Discovery Zoo in Owatonna, Minn.

While caring for the facility's 119 species and interacting with its inquisitive visitors seven days a week, Wiegert learned that working for a zoo is equal parts managing unpredictable animals and unpredictable people. During his two-month internship, the junior animal sciences major logged more than 400 hours as he ran the zoo's front desk, fed the animals, provided basic veterinary care and wrote information plaques for exhibits. He cautiously tossed food scraps to Big Al, a 12-foot alligator; stopped brave children from trying to tie a snake into a knot; and performed traveling shows at county fairs, parks and schools.

"Most people were really excited to see the animals because there aren't many reptiles in Minnesota," says Wiegert, a St. Charles, Mo., native. "At the fairs, I drew a bigger audience than the lumberjacks."






Scaly species were under Jeffrey Wiegert's care during his summer 2010 internship at the Reptile & Amphibian Discovery Zoo in Owatonna, Minn.

The internship earned him three credit hours toward his minor in [captive wild animal management](#) (CWAM), which requires 150 contact hours. Other students — many of whom hope to pursue careers in animal breeding, nutrition, zoos and aquariums, or animal rescue operations — have interned at zoos across the country as well as at the National Tiger Sanctuary in Bloomsdale, Mo., and the South Africa Ecolife Expedition.

Wiegert, whose mother was against him having a reptilian pet, says the CWAM program and its hands-on opportunities are what attracted him to study animal science at Mizzou. And now he can attest firsthand: It's one thing to read about alligators; it's quite another to share the front seat with one.

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| E-mail: [Mizzou@missouri.edu](mailto:Mizzou@missouri.edu)

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