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The Daily Biscuit

Andrea Kelley Discusses the Wildlife Waystation

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Andrea Kelley and Mira the tiger

Television production manager Andrea Kelley grew up learning about and working with wild animals. Her godmother Martine Colette founded the [Wildlife Waystation](#), one of the first animal sanctuaries established in the U.S. for wild and exotic animals.

"I spent my summers with her in Los Angeles and learned as much as I could about animal welfare and rescuing animals," Kelley says of her formative years.

The Wildlife Waystation was founded in 1965 and incorporated in 1976. The national nonprofit 501(c)3 sanctuary is dedicated to the rescue, rehabilitation, relocation and problem-solving of native, wild, and exotic animals. To date, the 160+ acre animal sanctuary has provided shelter and care to over 76,000 animals from

all over the world. The Wildlife Waystation currently has over 400 animal residents.

When Kelley started volunteering at the Wildlife Waystation, she was too young to work with the exotic animals. Instead, she learned every other aspect of maintaining the animal sanctuary—cleaning and building enclosures, animal behavior and differences in species.

"When I was older I had an understanding of personalities and species behavior ... and how to help them have the best life they can in captivity," Kelley says.

The Wildlife Waystation is home to bears, llamas, reptiles, wolves, many varieties of birds, all types of large

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cats, and has the largest chimpanzee colony in the western United States.

According to the sanctuary's website, these animals may have been former circus performers, members of animal exhibits, orphaned baby animals, abandoned as pets by their owners, or have come from research labs. The Wildlife Waystation aims to educate the public on preserving wildlife and ceasing its abuse and mistreatment.

Kelley started working with the sanctuary's larger animals when she turned 18, and has been bringing more awareness to issues surrounding wild animals ever since.



Andrea Kelley with Penelope, an african crested porcupine and retired industry animal

Mira the Tiger

"Today, I work full time in television production but I also work as one of the animal handlers at the Waystation in my spare time," Kelley says. "I am currently working with a 15-month-old tiger named Mira."

Mira was supposed to be relocated to an Oregon zoo from a private breeder when she was 3-months old, but when she developed a serious eye infection—nearly losing her vision—the zoo could no longer accept the tiger. That's when the Wildlife Waystation stepped in and offered her a permanent home.

Now that Mira has received the care she needed, she still has her eyesight.

"She used to be afraid of some of the animals and noises but now she is curious, wants to observe and inspect things," Kelley says, "She loves being in the rain and playing in her pool!"

More recently Mira has befriended the newly rescued tiger, Bhutan.

"Mira is so happy to have a brother to grow up with!" Kelley says.

Bhutan had been bred and purchased for the sole purpose of making a profit from 'pose with a tiger cub' photos. When he outgrew being a cub and became unruly, Bhutan was no longer of interest to his owners.

Fortunately, the Wildlife Waystation was able to come to the rescue.

Exotic Pet Trade

Kelley's wildlife expertise landed her a spot in the 2014 documentary *Give Me Shelter*, where she speaks about the exotic pet trade.

"The biggest thing we need to focus on in the U.S. is that not every state in America has regulations for owning exotic animals," Kelley tells *The Daily Biscuit*.

Currently, only 19 states have a ban on private ownership of exotic animals, and 12 states have a partial ban. Fourteen states require the owner of an exotic animal to obtain a license or permit from the relevant state agency to privately possess the animal, and five states have no license or permit regulations.

"The saddest part," Kelley says, "is it's the animals that pay the price and are euthanized when things go bad."

Kelley goes on to explain that until all of the states have the same regulations and prohibit the ownership of wild and exotic animals, "the exotic pet trade and the dangers to the animals and people involved will continue to be great."

Educating the Next Generation

Aside from the work Kelley does with the Wildlife Waystation and spreading awareness, she also encourages reaching out and educating the next generation about animal welfare.

"It is absolutely imperative to educate the younger generations on the destruction of habitat and loss of species our world is currently facing," Kelley explains. "If we cannot make a difference in our generation and prepare the younger generations to fight for



Andrea Kelley and Spike the alligator

Earth and its inhabitants, I fear for what the world will become."

The Wildlife Waystation offers tips on co-existing with wildlife [on their website](#).

Kelley says, "The children we raise today are the only hope we have to build a sustainable future for animals and the environment."

Get to Know Andrea Kelley

In addition to *Give Me Shelter*, some of Kelley's favorite animal-related films include: *Born Free*, *Free Willy*, *Benji the Hunted*, and *The Lion King*.

When asked to pinpoint what she loves about animals, Kelley says, "Their raw, natural beauty and power. They don't act to deceive, they act to live and survive. They are genuine."



Andrea Kelley with Rowdy, a capuchin who was a private pet until relinquished by his owner

Kelley notes that many people have a misunderstanding of animals. She explains that since wild animals have instincts and are not domesticated, it's important to avoid getting too comfortable believing they won't harm you.

"At the end of the day, they are a lion and you're a human," she says.

Kelley's two house cats include an orange tabby named Rhaja, and Angel, whom she rescued in 2009 when an entertainment studio retired the cat from the industry at age four.

On being part of the animal advocacy community, Kelley says, "We're all fighting for the same cause—to help ensure a better future for animals and humans!"



Rhaja and Angel, Andrea's house cats.

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