

TNP VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT

MICHELLE WILSON

IJAMS CHAPTER, 2018

CERTIFIED TENNESSEE NATURALIST + 300 HOUR MILESTONE

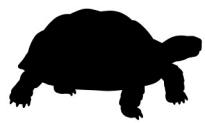
ANIMAL CARE/WILDLIFE REHABILITATION

LITTLE RIVER WILDLIFE
REHABILITATION



get to know...

LITTLE RIVER WILDLIFE REHABILITATION



Tennessee permitted home rehabilitation facility specializing in turtles, nonvenomous snakes, and amphibians



Take in sick and injured wild animals and provide them with care until they are able to be released back into the wild



Educational programs about how to better coexist with wildlife

- **How to prevent human-wildlife conflict**
- **Dispel fears and misunderstanding**
- **Gain awareness on what's happening in own backyard**

MISSION

To protect these vital species, while promoting understanding and appreciation for them within our community.



HOW IT STARTED

I was volunteering at Ijams Nature Center helping with their education animals and met some local wildlife rehabilitators at an event. After speaking with them, **I thought one day I would also like to do more for these animals.** I stayed at Ijams for 8 years continuing to help care for their animals. I also studied books, apprenticed with wildlife rehabbers, and attended classes and conferences for years to prepare to one day rehabilitate as well. I got my state license in 2024 and have been going for three seasons now.

I am the only all reptile/amphibian wildlife rehab in East Tennessee. As people learn that I am here, the more they are looking and helping animals. Despite being licensed by the state, I do not get paid or funded by the state. As the numbers grew, I decided to start Little River Wildlife Rehab as a 501(c)(3) in 2026 in an attempt to receive donations to help with the care these animals need. All the donations go directly into the care for the animals, such as vet bills, food, lighting, medication, and building more places to keep the animals as they recover and numbers continue to grow.

**“EVERY YEAR THE
NUMBERS GROW”**

YEAR 1: 17 animals

YEAR 2: 53 animals

YEAR 3: 68 animals

**AND THE
SEASON ISN'T
OVER YET!**



THE IMPACT OF TNP

The Tennessee Naturalist Program was the first step I took when I moved here 10 years ago to learn about my new home and find friends. I found all of that, plus mentors and community. The classes were so fun and interactive. Completing my initial volunteer hours with TNP led me to meeting the amazing women who care for wildlife everyday and brought me down this path. I still talk to many of my TNP classmates. Some of them also volunteer with the wildlife rehab and help release turtles back in their home territories. The Tennessee Naturalist Program definitely changed my life and helped me find my calling.

TNP continues to give back to me as well. I put out a request for transport volunteers and met Betty and Carol, two Certified Tennessee Naturalists from the Frozen Head chapter. They do all my Loudon county releases, and they are just amazing ladies. They are not afraid to knock on the door and talk to people and let them know the turtle is home. They make friends every time they transport. I am so grateful to have had them sign on.

PERSONAL REWARD

It is a reward every time an animal is healed and ready to go back out to the wild. Turtles live long lives, and between the people that find them, the efforts put in here at Little River Wildlife Rehabilitation, and the transporters who get them back home, **it all gives them a second chance they would not have gotten otherwise.** As humans continue to build and progress, we encroach on their homes and cause problems for them. I am happy to give back to them to try to make up for that.

This project has taught me patience and understanding, caring and compassion. Turtles take a long time to heal. I have to remember things move at their pace around here, not mine. So, we learn to take it day by day. I have learned to slow down.