**What recent interns have said about their time at Stillman:**

**2016**...there were several occasions where I learned about nature the hard way, whether it be running into rose bushes and hawthorn trees or receiving blisters on my arms after a run-in with a patch of cow parsnip. Words such as “phytophotodermatitis” now had a much more personal meaning as opposed to being a simple vocabulary word. However, it’s these types of experiences that really make the internship so special to me. These are things they can’t teach you in class. You can see as many pictures of animals and flowers as you want, but you never fully experience or learn about nature until you see it with your own eyes. For me, this was the most important thing that I learned ..., that experience is the best resource you have for learning about a specific field.

**2017**: I can say this was one of the best summers I have had in a long time, despite most of it being spent working. ...when I first came to Stillman ... the majority of the time was spent doing a rather hefty amount of trail trimming—or, as we came to call it, a bit of botanical assassination. Over time I learned to identify many of the wild flora the grows in the nature center; which ones I was meant to leave alone and which ones I had the go-ahead to take out with no mercy. Even now I still find myself inadvertently identifying plants I see on the side of the road as I recognize them from my time at Stillman. I may have also developed a particular fondness for fresh mulberries, one of Stillman’s most readily available mid-summer snacks...

... the sweeping knowledge and experience captured throughout this job is irreplaceable. From repetitious humor to ungodly stench and discomfort, the center, and its curator, offered and abundance of lesson and legacy. The spectrum of lectures and teachings varied from topics of zoology, forestry, entomology, botany, along with  discussion of current events and exchanges of tales. This compilation of wisdom and entertainment personified an odd and unique experience that is itself, the Stillman Nature Center.

**2019:** Stillman is a perfect example of finding beautiful, mostly undisturbed wildlife right in

your backyard. You don’t need to travel far and wide to see nature. Stillman is tucked in a

suburban neighborhood, but that’s hard to believe when you are walking down a narrow path

through the woods and walk out into a prairie or next to a cattail marsh. I used to think the “best” nature had to be pristine and completely undisturbed, which I knew was both uncommon and unlikely to find. I can now appreciate that humans are allowed to go into an area, feel close to wildlife, and see/hear/feel things that they can’t in a developed area. Isn’t it important for people to experience something firsthand if they are going to care about it? Seeing nature from a paved path is a totally different experience than going down a gravel/woodchip path and feeling engulfed in the woods.

When clearing buckthorn for the first time...Sue (one of the bosses) called out that there was a garter snake slithering around in the tall grass near the pond. We all simultaneously dropped our loppers and bowsaws and ran to the edge of the pond. Afterwards it became the joke that while most people would run away from a wild snake, Stillman Interns run towards it.

**2021:** ...the environment that is created by Mark Spreyer is one of laughter and learning. ...the hands-on learning that I have gotten from Stillman Nature Center is something that will be useful to me for the rest of my career; that is something I am very grateful for.

...you will become a botanical assassin just like the interns before you and you'll want to cut every buckthorn cluster you see. A few must-haves for interns: Hat, long pants, gloves, water and bug spray.

When it comes to the raptors…You will have to handle some gross stuff but you will get used to it, make sure you don't have a weak stomach. Remember, they are not pets! If you have any questions, don't be scared to ask someone. All the volunteers are super helpful and will make your job so much easier when it comes to cleaning.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**...**we spent some time discussing different land ethics, such as those who desire to preserve nature versus those who desire to manage land in order to use nature. As someone who has participated in ecological restoration for years, I was surprised to hear so many differing views in this specific area. However, I agree... there is no single way to manage natural land, and I believe hearing varying perspectives has helped better prepare me for the field and future opposition.

Although these discussions were important, we focused more on having fun while learning, as most of our conversations included a healthy dose of humor. As a tip to interns, some things that Mark does take seriously is caring for the raptors, academic honesty, and having the interns read his book.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After the birds, the work I did with plants and land management would also stand out during my time with Stillman. Staff members Lara and Sue helped teach native and non-native species that are beneficial or harmful to the environmental management plan they have. Tools like loppers, hand-saws, and snippers were all used to make precise cuts to specific individuals. Species such as buckthorn, honeysuckle, and parsnip were taken out to help clear trails and maintain a safe path for travelers. Oaks, sumac, maples, and even a tulip poplar were maintained, watered, and cleared of debris and shade to encourage growth. After some piles were large enough, we conducted safe and controlled burns. … Stillman was a great way to learn more about plant diversity and how to maintain and manage it.

Not only was it an internship about conservation, but also about how to interact with people who may not have a lot of knowledge about natural resources. During programs I had to answer questions from visitors about the birds, the area, or other environmental questions in a clear and concise manner. Every week, we did a talk or slideshow about an article written by Mark. I learned that ...science is continually changing, and so is the knowledge we have learned over the history of ecosystem management or the natural world itself. Reading these articles helped put information into a different view so that, hopefully, other people can become as fascinated and excited about conservation as Mark, Sue, Lara, and the rest of the Stillman staff.