

AMY KIGHT

Executive Director, Busch Wildlife Sanctuary

Born and raised in South Florida, Amy Kight grew up in an animal-loving family. A family friend who was a veterinarian offered her her very first job involving animals. “As a volunteer, I’d wipe down the exam rooms, clean bird cages, and watch dogs,” says Kight, who has been the executive director of Busch Wildlife Sanctuary for the past four years. “Working with animals is my passion because every day is different.”

Kight is highly qualified for her job with the not-for-profit organization dedicated to the protection and conservation of Florida wildlife and natural resources. In 2002, she earned a bachelor of arts in psychology from Florida Atlantic University, later obtaining an associate’s degree of applied science in veterinary technology from St. Petersburg College.

“I have worked at Busch Wildlife Sanctuary for more than 15 years in different capacities and was already employed there when I went back to college to learn why you give medicine to patients and how to keep wildlife healthy,” she says. “I love nature and all animals, so education and caring for them is not work for me.”

Kight worked her way to the top of one of the most respected local wildlife organizations, which is also a leader in conservation education. She served as the sanctuary’s education director for five years before being promoted to animal control director and then executive director in 2017. Prior to joining the sanctuary, she worked as Palm Beach County’s wildlife officer; she also holds multiple certifications and is an internationally certified wildlife rehabilitator.

In 1994, the Peter W. Busch Family Foundation joined the Wildlife Rehabilitation and Environmental Education Center to create Busch Wildlife Sanctuary. Today, the sanctuary offers free medical and rehab care to about 5,000 patients across more than 256 different species with the goal of returning each to its respective natural habitat.

Over the years, the sanctuary has rescued hawks, great blue herons, screech owls, squirrels, bald eagles, deer, foxes, bobcats, and panthers, among others. Last year, Kight and her team treated around 5,600 wildlife patients at their hospital. She applauds her staff of 26 and another 100 volunteers who devote their time during season, many of them women. “I hire a lot of females,” says Kight. “They seem to be drawn to this industry and love it as much as I do.”

Kight lives in Jupiter Farms with her husband, chickens, donkeys, dogs, cats, and a porcupine. “My pets are my children,” she says. She arrives at work each day around 7:30 a.m. after she has finished tending to her “zoo at home.”

Under her leadership, the sanctuary is in the middle of a huge expansion. Kight is currently in meetings with architects, surveyors, and planners because the sanctuary, which relies on donations, is moving from its current Jupiter location to loftier and larger quarters in Jupiter Farms, hopefully by March 2022. The facility size is increasing from 11 to 19.4 acres. “We are devoting 5 acres to rehab, adding more hospital space, outdoor acreage, and parking, and will host exhibits,” says Kight. “We intend to show visitors how things used to look in Florida.”

Kight finds her work extremely satisfying because she understands that humans share an environment with wildlife—and that we must respect one another. That goes for all species, even venomous reptiles like the two rattlesnakes, copperhead, and water moccasin who are part of her wildlife family.

Giving animals freedom after they heal from injury, illness, or just being scared creates a bond between human and animal that Kight believes the animals understand. “It is amazing,” she says. “I especially love the part where I can hold a bald eagle on my arm and see the connection.” buschwildlife.org

