



Staff Profile:

Katarina Warnick

Undergraduate Research Coordinator

“Make sure that you’re contributing to the team, because that’s what field work is all about.”

Katarina’s Story

Katarina has always had a strong and self-driven interest in the natural world. While she grew up in a very indoors-y environment, at age 7 she asked to go to sleepaway camp and learn outdoor skills. Seven glorious summers camping, hiking, and canoeing in the Wisconsin woods solidified a passion for the natural world that has defined Katarina’s path forward.

Katarina first came to Colorado as a high school student, when she spent a summer living on Zuni and Navajo Nation lands, and exploring the San Juan Mountains in southwest Colorado. A challenging backpacking trip in this area was a turning point, and also one of the hardest things Katarina has ever done. “It was just miles and miles with so much weight, and I got hypothermia. But I really learned how to live outside, take care of and listen to my body, trust my feet and myself when hiking and climbing, and how to maintain a positive attitude when things suck.” After that experience, Katarina knew she needed to come back to Colorado for college.



Katarina working at a wildlife rehabilitation center in South Africa

Katarina in a Nutshell



Best part of the job: I love working with students. I’ve had several positions at CFRI, so I really know what they’re going through and can relate to them. It’s rewarding to watch class material click for them in the field, and to be a part of their growth and learning.

Most challenging part of the job: Starting as a student and moving to the research staff. It’s taken me a long time to realize that my voice is valuable—I’m the only person on staff without a master’s degree, but I still bring a unique and important perspective

Best field snack: Leftover Crazy Karl’s pizza with jalapenos, cream cheese, and pineapple.

Hobbies: When we’re not in quarantine I love spinning, cross-stitch and embroidery, going to breweries, road trips, and heading out to Poudre Canyon with friends. I also like hanging out with my rabbit Olive, and listening to true crime podcasts.

Favorite plant: Mariposa lily, because when you’re in a field of a ton of plants you can spot them easily, and they’re so pretty.



At CSU, Katarina started as an art major before settling into natural resource management in the Warner College. She might not have known what she wanted to do exactly, but she knew she wanted it to be outside. Katarina worked in the CSU Weed Research Lab where she helped to publish a book (*Native and Non-Native Seedlings of the West*), for which she grew and photographed 80 species of seeds and plants. This experience greatly added to Katarina's plant identification experience, which she credits as a crucial piece of why she was ultimately hired in 2016 as a field technician with CFRI.

Though she was excited to dive into field work, it was also very tough. Katarina admits that she almost gave up—she felt like an outsider, and like she wasn't cut out for the work. However, she stuck with it and has continued to grow in the organization. She became a senior field technician, and then a crew leader, and gained experience with project management and training field crews on CFRI monitoring protocols.

As permanent research staff at CFRI, Katarina now helps to manage and train students, and has been instrumental in the growth and improvement of CFRI's student employee Training Week. She helps to manage data when it comes back from the field, and is crucial in the process of cleaning data in preparation for our database. Katarina supports CFRI's analytical efforts through this work, though she doesn't consider herself a scientist. "That word doesn't encompass what I do, or what people at CFRI do, it's just so much more multifaceted than that."

Field Stories with Katarina

We went to some private land to do some training on CFRI monitoring protocols. The landowner had mentioned that he used the area as a burial site for animals that had died on the ranch. I thought this was going to be no big deal—we encounter deer bones and carcasses and stuff like that in the woods all the time. Well, we rolled up, got out of the car, and I immediately thought, "what is that smell, I've never smelled that before," and it was of course the unmistakable smell of decomposition. We thought, "OK, we'll get over it." Then on the way to the plot we ran into this gigantic dead cow that was the source of everything. Throughout the day we kept having to move plots to complete training because we don't know how to measure things like hooves. What is that, litter?



A trip to Rocky Mountain National Park

For example, Katarina has become more involved in Warner College's diversity and inclusion efforts, and has formed new relationships with other members of the college pursuing these goals. "This is important on so many levels. I'm Hispanic, and also half white and very privileged. I see the good side and the bad side. Sometimes I notice I'm the only person of color in the room. Some of my family...aren't included in these conversations, and it's important for people of all walks of life to be and not people who just fit one mold." Through her membership on the Warner College Diversity and Inclusion Committee, she is working to create a sexual harassment training that relates specifically to field work, and also creating a framework for reporting incidents in the field.

What Katarina Wishes Everyone Knew about Forestry:



What we're managing for affects everyone. Being in this field and working in this field is for everyone. You can be anyone as long as you have an interest and a work ethic.