

TOUR: CAREERS AT THE ZOO

OBJECTIVES

To expose students to the variety of positions and professions associated with zoos.

Students will be able to:

1. List at least four zoo related jobs/professions
2. Describe two jobs/professions with some detail concerning skills necessary to work in these fields.

GETTING STARTED

Introduce yourself, rules while on tour. What are some of the jobs your audience can name that involve animals? There are many different jobs that need to be filled in order to run and maintain a zoo.

PENGUINS

Brief information about the animals.

Does anyone know how high a penguin can jump out of the water? Exhibit designers, those who build cages or exhibits for animals, need to know this. Why? We actually had all our penguins escape opening day by jumping out over a low spot in the rock work. These penguins can porpoise 6 feet out of the water.

Point out the ID bands and discuss their importance for the keepers. Mention the “medicated” fish and their importance to maintaining the health of all the penguins.

BIRD/REPTILE HOUSE

Reptiles in particular require special care—cold-blooded. Keepers need to know how to tell when one is sick, how to properly care for their cages, and design exhibits that keep them healthy.

Birds: Several breeding pairs on exhibit. Keepers need to know what each species needs in order to breed successfully. Other professions include breeders and trainers.

SMALL MOATS

Animal info as needed.

Wildlife biologist: monitor wild animal populations; help with managing wild areas; with some endangered animals they are needed to capture and collar animals so they can be monitored; when populations start to decline, a wildlife biologist is usually the first to notify the proper authorities so that the animals may be saved; important for advising legislators on environmental issues.

Forestry Service: manages forests and other wild areas to ensure that there is adequate food available for the native wildlife; protect our country’s natural heritage.

Conservation officer: enforces hunting laws and protects native plants and animals from being destroyed or taken illegally.

KANGAROO BARN

Show cooler and carnivore diet.

Nutritionist: someone who develops well balanced diets for the animals at the zoo in order to keep them healthy; responsible for researching and experimenting to derive the best possible formula of foods to maintain the animal collection in good health.

FELINE/PRIMATE HOUSE

Keeper: need to know behaviors of animals in their care in order to properly care for them (cats and their diets); they try to provide animals with some activity to prevent boredom; mention transmission of diseases and precautions that keepers take to keep their animals healthy.

Veterinarian: cares for the health of the entire collection; animals can’t tell a veterinarian where it hurts (compare to their doctor); can’t always weigh animals before you them medication, so the vet needs to be able to guess weights.

Vet assistant: aids veterinarian

Animal behaviorist: studies animal behaviors in wild to discover ways to meet needs of captive counterparts; study animals in captivity to see how zoos can improve their care of these animals; provide information to the rest of the world to further the understanding of animals.

OTHER ZOO OPPORTUNITIES

With nearly 200 million people visiting AZA institutions annually, all zoo and aquarium employees have the opportunity to educate the public about the critical need for the conservation of wildlife and wild lands. This responsibility assures an interesting and rewarding career, but the profession requires more than a commitment to conservation—it requires hard work.

Zoo and aquarium employment is not always glamorous. Much of the work requires physical strength, as well as the ability to make detailed observations and keep information up-to-date. It takes a special kind of dedication to provide care to captive animals that require attention 24 hours a day, seven days a week, come snow, rain, or shine.

The conservation and scientific programs in zoos and aquariums have become highly technical and specialized. Although practical experience with animals may sometimes be substituted for academic training, most entry-level keeper positions now require a four-year college degree.

Training in animal science, zoology, marine biology, conservation biology, wildlife management, and animal behavior is preferred. Curatorial, research, and conservation positions typically require advanced academic degrees.

Students wishing to pursue animal-related careers are encouraged to carefully review the curriculum of the schools they wish to attend, as some programs focus more on a zoological application than others. Students who are interested

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in the business side of zoo and aquarium operations should concentrate on skills related to a particular area of expertise, such as accounting, public relations, marketing, or personnel management. Whatever your career goal, guidance counselors can offer assistance in determining the most appropriate course of study.

SALARIES

Salaries for zoo and aquarium employees vary depending on the institution and its location. Institutions located in metropolitan areas generally offer higher salaries. An animal keeper's salary can range from minimum wage to more than \$30,000 a year, depending on skills and tenure. Salaries for other employees usually compare favorably with those prevailing in that region.

POSITION DESCRIPTIONS

Listed below are some positions in zoos and aquariums and a brief description of duties. Not all positions are found in all facilities, and responsibilities often vary.

Director/chief operating officer: executes policies as directed by the governing authority. Responsible for the institution's operation and plans for future development.

Assistant director: assists the director and assumes charge in the director's absence.

Finance manager/director: manages the institution's finances, including payment of bills, purchasing, investments, and the preparation of financial statements.

General curator: oversees an institution's entire animal collection and animal management staff. Responsible for strategic collection planning.

Animal curator: manages a certain portion of an institution's animal collection; i.e., mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, etc.

Veterinarian: responsible for the health care program for the animal collection and the maintenance of health records.

Veterinary technician: assists the veterinarian and provides care to the animals under the supervision of the veterinarian.

Registrar: maintains computer records on the animal collection and applies for permits and licenses to hold or transport animals.

Curator/coordinator/director of research: supervises research projects, serves as liaison between the institution and the academic community, and publishes articles in scientific journals.

Curator/coordinator/director of conservation: oversees the institution's conservation activities, including field projects. Serves as liaison with government wildlife agencies and other conservation organizations.

Conservation biologist/zoologist: provides scientific and technical assistance in the management of the animal collection and assists in conducting various research or field conservation projects.

Head keeper/aquarist: supervises a section or department of the institution; provides training and scheduling for keepers.

Senior keeper/aquarist: provides primary animal care for a department.

Keeper/aquarist: provides daily care to the institution's animals, including diet preparation, cleaning, general exhibit maintenance, and record keeping.

Operations director/manager: responsible for the daily operation of the institution's physical plant and equipment.

Curator of exhibits: creates exhibits and assists in the design of graphics.

Curator of horticulture: responsible for the botanical collection and its application to the animal collection, as well as daily maintenance of the institution's grounds. **Curator of education:** plans and implements the institution's education programs.

Public relations/affairs manager/director: promotes the institution, its mission, and its programs to the public via the media.

Development director/officer: develops and manages fundraising activities which can include writing grant proposals and attracting corporate sponsors, as well as soliciting private donations.

Marketing director/manager: creates advertising campaigns and other activities to increase public awareness of the institution.

Special events manager/coordinator: develops and implements events to attract visitors throughout the year.

Membership director/manager: responsible for maintaining and increasing institution memberships for families and individuals and designing special events for members only. May also be in charge of "adopt-an-animal" programs to raise funds.

Gift shop manager: manages staff and all aspects of gift shop operation from buying products to designing shops.

Visitor services manager: supervises the staff and facilities that cater to the visiting public including concessions and restrooms.

Personnel manager/director: responsible for all personnel matters including payroll, insurance, and tax matters.

Volunteer coordinator: responsible for recruiting and maintaining a staff of volunteers/docents. Duties include scheduling docents for on- and off-grounds activities and keeping docents abreast of new developments to relate to the public.

Docent/volunteer: duties may include diet preparation, small animal care, teaching educational programs, leading group tours, and staffing special events.

Review some of the jobs/professions by asking them to name some and describe what they do. Which jobs would they like to work?