



Zookeeper Interview – Animal Trainer

First Name & Title: Lora - Wildlife Show
Animal Trainer

How did you become a zookeeper?

I knew from a very early age that I wanted to take care of animals at the zoo. I grew up visiting Denver Zoo and knew that one day I wanted to be a zookeeper here. I feel very fortunate that I get to have my dream job at one of my favorite zoos in the world.



What education and/or training did you need for this job/career?

In high school, I joined the Explorers volunteer program at Denver Zoo and got the opportunity to job shadow various Zookeepers in their work to make sure that I was interested in the field. I then attended school at Colorado State University and received a bachelor degree in Zoology. The classes were a lot of work but gave me some great information/skills that I use on the job occasionally. I highly recommend that anyone interested in becoming a Zookeeper do as much volunteering or internships in the field to gain experience and knowledge about the job. It is hard work but well worth the effort. I have also attended a few workshops to learn more about the specifics of the job and how to take better care of the animals and recommend taking any of those (some familiar organizations are AZA, ABMA, IAATE). Most of my experience with training has been self-taught, what I have learned at a conference, what I have read ("Don't Shoot the Dog,") and troubleshooting with coworkers.

What is the daily routine like for a zookeeper?

This is something that Zookeepers often joke about; there is no "typical" day for us. When you take care of live animals you need to be ready for anything to come up. It is our utmost responsibility to take the best care of each animal and understand that sometimes unexpected things happen. What we strive to do is balance our day between duties such as cleaning, training, giving enrichment (new objects that will improve the mental and physical welfare of the animals), attending meetings and other miscellaneous tasks to help take care of the animals (e.g. giving baths, clipping nails, getting them to exercise).

What is the hardest part of your job?

Hands down my answer is having to say goodbye to one of the animals and knowing at what point it is time to do so.





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What is the best part of your job?

Having one of the coolest jobs and getting to work in one of the coolest places in the country! I don't have to dread getting up in the morning and coming into work because I think about all of the fun ways I get to interact with each animals and what behavior I get to train them next. When I am training an animal on a new behavior and they finally have the "ah ha" moment of understanding what they should do is such an amazing feeling of connection and happiness.

What type of diet do you feed the animals in your care?

Since we have such a variety of animals at the Wildlife Show, the diets are also quite varied. We feed anything from nuts in the shell to our parrots, to live and wiggly mealworms to our lesser anteater, to mice to our raptors, to grapes to our hornbills, to almond butter to our pig, to raw equine meat to our African serval. It is really different to have to cut these food items into pieces with scissors....I joke around that it isn't always the most glamorous job.

What is the most beneficial class you took in high school or college to prepare for this career?

My favorite courses that I took in college to help me prepare for being a Zookeeper were Zoo Nutrition, Birds of Prey and Poisonous Plants.

What advice would you give someone wanting/trying to work in this field?

Get as much volunteer experience as possible. Try to have a thick skin and don't give up on your dreams if you have a difficult time getting a job. There are very few zoos and oftentimes there are hundreds of people going for a single position. Stay positive and highlight what you are passionate about and the fun experiences that you have had and eventually the perfect job will be yours!

