



Zookeeper Interview - Birds

First Name & Title: Jessica - Animal Keeper, Birds

How did you become a zookeeper?

After I graduated from college, I started out as an unpaid intern at Denver Zoo, then got a temporary paid position, and finally was hired as a full-time keeper.

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

I got a bachelor's degree in Zoology at Colorado State University. While I was in college I did an internship in the bird lab, which helped me get some experience handling and studying birds. My internships at Denver Zoo were an opportunity for me to learn about zookeeping and get my foot in the door for this career.



What is the daily routine like for a zookeeper?

Bird Keepers start the day by checking and finding all our birds, cleaning exhibits and feeding the birds. During the middle part of the day we prepare diets for the next day, do projects like breeding set-ups, enrichment and training projects, observations, or exhibit work. We also assist with medical procedures when needed. At the end of the day we feed and find birds again and make sure everyone is set for the night.

What is the hardest part of your job?

Physically there is a lot of heavy lifting and manual labor, but the hardest part for me is the emotional side when a bird is sick or passes away – just like with pets at home, this is part of life, but it is still hard to experience.

What is the best part of your job?

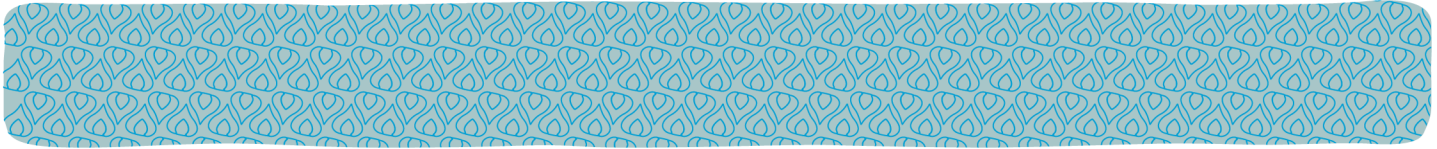
I love to watch our birds' nest and raise chicks – knowing that I gave them what they needed to be successful is very rewarding.

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

We care for such a variety of birds, the diets vary quite a bit. Many of our birds eat fruit and bird pellet mixes, but we also have birds that eat meat, fish, and rodents. A lot of our birds enjoy live insects as well.

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

Ornithology was very helpful background for me and instilled a love of birds that I didn't have before college, although I didn't know at the time I would be pursuing a career with birds. Learning about and practicing public speaking was also an important skill I learned in school.





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

If you really want to be a zookeeper, it will likely be a long road in this competitive field! Just stay positive, be willing to travel and take chances (like working at a smaller zoo), and work hard – if your work shines you will make a name for yourself. Also, be sure that you enjoy interacting with guests, because that is an important part of our job that many people don't think about.

