



## Zookeeper

### Commonly Asked Questions

#### **As a zookeeper, what are the job duties and responsibilities?**

Zookeepers are responsible for all aspects of the physical and mental health of the animals under their care. They also work closely with veterinary staff to ensure that any medical issues are addressed in a timely manner. The job includes tasks such as cleaning exhibits and enclosures, preparing and distributing diets, creating and distributing environmental enrichment, and behavioral training. At Denver Zoo, we train our animals with positive reinforcement techniques, and work hard to ensure that our animals are stimulated mentally and physically through enrichment, which is essentially anything that encourages natural behaviors for our captive animals. There is also a record keeping component to the role; this ensures communication between keepers, supervisors, and vet staff.

#### **Do you need to go to college to become a zookeeper?**

Yes, you DO need a college degree to be a zookeeper- this is a large change from how the profession used to be even 25 years ago when people often did not have degrees. In today's hiring market, some of our keepers have advanced degrees as well. It has changed to become a career path that is competitive and one where the expectation is that a zookeeper be well educated and able to work with animals, as well as have a desire to connect with people and speak publicly about the animals in their care. We recommend students consider degrees that interest them; typically, zookeepers have degrees in the natural sciences like biology, zoology, conservation biology, anthropology, environmental studies, animals sciences, etc.

#### **Is it hard to get a job as a zookeeper?**

It is competitive to get a job as a zookeeper, especially at the larger zoos. Often, keepers start at smaller zoos and get experience first before applying at a larger zoo. We recommend teens seek out ways to get experience working with animals even in non-zoo settings like animal shelters. Not only will this help build your resume, but you also want to know this is the type of career you are interested in. Many animal organizations and zoos (including Denver Zoo) have volunteer programs and internships; these are great ways to get involved too.

#### **Do you work with ALL the animals, all species?**

This depends on the zoo facility. At smaller zoos, keepers tend to work with a larger variety of animals simply because there are less animals and less staff. At larger zoos, like Denver Zoo, our keepers tend to specialize in different areas. For example, we have keepers that only work with primates, and they may even have a primary area within primates. They can work with any of the animals in that area including gorillas, orangutans, mandrills, lemurs, etc. but they do not with animals outside of the primate area. In some areas though, the keepers take care of a variety of animals because of the location where they live. For example, in Toyota Elephant Passage, we have keepers that work with Small Clawed otters, hornbills and fishing cats because they share a building and all live in the same ecosystem in the wild.

