

Jobs at an Aquarium

Aquarist

Job description

The primary responsibility of an Aquarist is to care for the fish and invertebrates living in the many exhibits throughout the Aquarium. This includes feeding the animals and maintaining their habitat by cleaning it and keeping it as natural as possible. Planning the daily diets for the all of the animals, treating them for diseases and weekly collecting trips are a few more of the Aquarist duties.

Education

A four year college degree in Biology or a related field is a requirement to become an aquarist. Many full time aquarists begin their career as part time aquarists or volunteers in the department. The combination of volunteer or part time experience and a college degree increases the chances of becoming a full time aquarist.

Why be an aquarist?

Being an Aquarist is a very rewarding and exciting profession. To successfully care for an exhibit, aquarists are continually learning about the habitat as well as nutritional and medical requirements of various animals. This learning process is very exciting and although aquarists are armed with extensive knowledge, the natural world is always full of surprises leading to a new challenge every day. Going on collecting trips and working with such a large variety of exciting animals is the best part about being an Aquarist!

The downside

Aquarists spend much of their time behind the scenes taking care of the animals and exhibits. Because of this, one of the downsides to the job can be the limited interaction with the people visiting the aquarium that have come to enjoy your beautiful work! The long hours involved with the job can be another shortcoming.

Typical day

Morning

- Observe the animals and prepare the exhibits for opening to the public.
- Prepare food for the animals. Each animal requires a strict diet rich in nutrients and vitamins.
- Clean and improve exhibits

Mid-day

- Maintain the filtering systems
- Maintain water quality

Afternoon

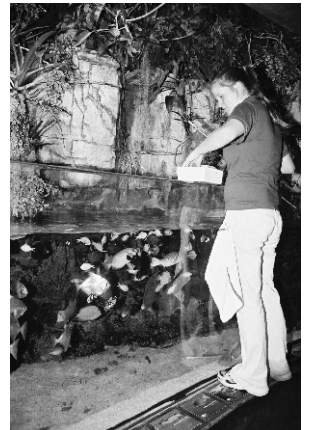
- Evaluate the exhibits for overnight safety
- Work on new projects or exhibits.
- Additional feedings for certain animals are required in the afternoon

Competitive?

Because being an aquarist is an exciting and challenging job, it tends to be a competitive field. However, there is always room for people with the proper education, training and desire to work hard.

Advice

It is ALWAYS helpful to gain practical experience in anyway possible. Volunteering and college internships are an excellent way to begin your career as an Aquarist. This will enable you to see what an aquarist does on a daily basis and decide if this career is right for you. Learning as much as possible about the plants and animals living in the ocean by reading, visiting aquariums, snorkeling and having your own home aquarium can also be very helpful. Consider getting certified as a scuba diver, it's a great way to learn about the ocean first hand. The most important step to take towards becoming an Aquarist is getting your college degree.



Jobs at an Aquarium

Education Specialist

Job Description

The main responsibility of an Education Specialist at the Aquarium is to educate the visiting school groups or public about a variety of marine related topics. Program development and enhancement are also a large part of the job description to keep the programs exciting for the students. Another important aspect is training the education volunteers because they help with a lot of the education that takes place at the aquarium.

Schooling

Educators at the Aquarium have a four year degree in Biology or a related field. Many also have a minor in education.

Why be an educator?

Being an educator at the Aquarium is a very rewarding and exciting position. It is satisfying to know that you are using your education in a positive way by educating the public. Marine and environmental education is becoming increasingly important as we try to protect the ocean through education. This, along with the level of excitement the students have when you teach them about a new subject, are some of the best reasons to become an Aquarium educator.

The downside

Teaching the classes in the Aquarium for four or five hours straight can be very draining for one person. It is also not a position one will become rich doing!

Typical day

Morning

- Set up the classroom for the classes you will have during the morning
- Teach up to three classes

Mid-day

- Set up the classroom for the classes you will have during the afternoon

Afternoon

- Teach afternoon classes
- Clean up the classrooms and supplies used throughout the day
- Evaluate current programs and work on developing projects or programs

Competitive?

Education Specialist positions at the Aquarium are limited so when a position does become available, it is very competitive.

Advice

Most of the Education Specialists at the Aquarium have had a wide range of experiences and training in many areas of marine science and marine biology, including field work. The Educators teach many different types of classes and have a general knowledge of a variety of marine biology subjects. Volunteering is an excellent way to get involved in marine education. Working part-time or interning is also beneficial.



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Aviculturist

Job description

The primary responsibility of an aviculturist is to care for the birds living at the Aquarium by keeping them healthy and active. This includes feeding, cleaning and maintaining the exhibit as a proper habitat to promote the natural behaviors of the birds.

Schooling

Aviculturists typically have a four year degree in Biology or a related field. Focus is often on zoological courses dealing with taxonomic recognition and ecology.

Why be an aviculturist?

When working with any type of animal, one tends to form a bond with that animal. The same holds true for working with birds. After a bond of trust is formed between the aviculturist and the birds, the birds learn to depend on the aviculturist and that can be very rewarding. Birds are also among the most populous animal in the world and are involved in every aspect of how our environment thrives.

The downside

Caring for birds requires a lot of time, hard-work and dedication. Caring for one bird can be challenging and time consuming. Our aviculturists are at times caring for over 100 birds! A second downside can also be cleaning up after the birds!

Typical day

Morning

- Check the birds and make sure they are happy and content.
- Check the air and water systems to make sure they are working correctly.
- Perform morning feeding and cleaning.

Mid-Day

- Mid-day feeding and cleaning

Afternoon

- Afternoon feeding and cleaning
- Evaluate the exhibit for overnight safety

Competitive?

Being an aviculturist can be very competitive. Ornithology is one of the oldest areas of study and work, with many areas of specialization.

Advice

Obtaining your degree is the most important step you can take to prepare yourself for this career. As with many other careers in the aquarium, volunteering is an excellent way to get involved. You can begin volunteering as early as high school to prepare yourself and get as much experience as possible.

Here is a word of advice from one of our own aviculturists: “Your interest should be totally absorbing. To be good and to do justice to your animals, you need lots of experience and training. The financial side is really challenging. In this career, keep the animal’s welfare first in your mind. This priority will guide you to a successful venture, whether it is a big public aquarium or your pet dog.”



Jobs at an Aquarium

Life Support Technician

Job description

Life Support Systems Technicians are responsible for monitoring and maintaining all of the equipment that is associated with the live animal exhibits. This equipment includes pumps, sand filters and other equipment that is critical to animal health. It is also the job of a life support technician to perform routine maintenance on the aquatic exhibits. This maintenance includes backwashing filters, doing water changes and adding chemicals to improve the quality of the saltwater. Life Support Systems Technicians are also responsible for improving exhibits by building new ones or changing filtration equipment.

Education

This position is a unique combination of engineering, biology and chemistry. A degree in one of these fields is highly desirable, but not required. An engineering degree enables the technicians to better understand the mechanical processes involved while a biology degree is helpful in understanding what is needed to keep the animals healthy.

Why be a life support technician?

The job of a Life Support Systems Technician is very interesting and challenging. Each day presents a new or different challenge such as fixing a broken piece of equipment that is important to an animal's health or building a new exhibit. In addition, there is nothing more interesting than working in a building full of beautiful and mysterious ocean creatures. The job of a Life Support Systems Technician is very challenging because the lives of animals depend on what they do. Maintaining equipment that is critical to animal health is a tremendous amount of responsibility, but if done successfully, can be very rewarding.

The downside

It is required that there is a technician at the aquarium 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This means that they are required to work odd hours. It is not uncommon for a life support technician to work evenings, overnights, weekends and even holidays. The work of a Life Support Systems Technician can also be very strenuous. There is often a lot of physical work involved very similar to a construction job. This can make the job physically demanding at times, however most technicians find this part of the job very enjoyable.

Typical day

Morning

- Inspect all equipment and exhibits to make sure everything is running well.
- Fix any problems that are encountered during morning inspection.
- Perform routine maintenance that is scheduled for that day.
- Answer any emergency calls from animal care staff about faulty equipment.

Afternoon

- Continue any unfinished morning work.
- Work on improvement projects that are assigned by life support manager.

Evening

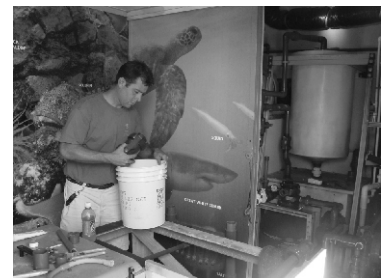
- Provide lighting support for evening events at the Aquarium.
- Perform exhibit maintenance such as filter backwashing, water changes and chemical manipulations to the saltwater.
- Provide support to education staff for sleepover groups and classes.

Competitive?

Getting a job as a Life Support Systems Technician can be difficult because there are so few Aquariums. When a position does become available, there are usually a large number of applicants for it.

Advice

The best advice for someone interested in getting into this field is to start volunteering at your local Aquarium or Zoo. Aquariums often hire hard working volunteers to become full time paid employees. Volunteering combined with working toward a college degree in engineering or biology is a great way to start your career as Life Support Systems Technician.



Jobs at an Aquarium

Mammalogist

Job description

The primary responsibility of a Mammalogist at the Aquarium is to care for and train our collection of marine mammals including seals, sea lions, and sea otters. Caring for the animals includes preparing diets, exhibit maintenance, monitoring health, and behavioral training.

Schooling

Mammalogists most commonly have a 4-year degree in Biology or a related field. In addition, people often take additional courses in psychology because behavior modification has grown into a prominent part of their job. This includes the areas of training and enrichment.

Why be a mammalogist

Being close to and working with marine mammals is exciting. Many trainers become attached to the animals they are working with and eventually form bonds with them. The marine mammals living in aquariums are often great examples for the general public about the importance of marine conservation. Through daily training programs, Mammalogists help educate the public by demonstrating many of the animals' natural behaviors and this is very rewarding.

The downside

Although the marine mammals living in the aquarium are trained, they are still considered wild animals and may be unpredictable. This could make being a mammalogist a dangerous profession at times. Taking good care of marine mammals is a difficult and challenging position.

Typical day

Morning

- Exhibit maintenance and cleaning
- Prepare and weigh diets for the day
- Morning feeding and training

Mid-day

- Mid-day feeding
- Develop new training and enrichment ideas

Afternoon

- Afternoon feeding
- Evaluate the exhibits before closing for safety
- Pull out fish or other food that needs to be thawed overnight

Competitive?

Yes, being a Mammalogist or trainer at an aquarium or related facility is very competitive. Many people would like to work with marine mammals for obvious reasons!

Advice

While obtaining a degree, getting experience through volunteering or interning is extremely important. Because the field is so competitive, you will need to set yourself apart from the other candidates with the amount of training and education you have in the field. Since many facilities hire applicants from within the organization, volunteering or interning is a good idea.



Jobs at an Aquarium

Water Quality Technician

Job Description

The main responsibility of the water quality technician at the Aquarium is to test and monitor the water quality in all of the exhibits throughout the aquarium. The state of the water quality is extremely important to keep the animals healthy. The technician tests for many water quality parameters including salinity, pH, ammonia, nitrites and alkalinity.

Schooling

Water Quality technicians have a four year degree in Biology, Hydrology or a related science. An emphasis in Chemistry is very important.

Why be a water quality technician

When everything is running smoothly and water quality is good, it is very rewarding for the technician. It is also exciting to have the large responsibility of keeping the animals healthy by monitoring the water quality in the exhibits.

The downside

When the aquarium is running smoothly and water quality is good, the job can be very slow. For active people, this might be a downside.

Typical Day

Morning

- Visually inspect each exhibit
- Collect water samples from each exhibit

Mid-day

- Bring samples back to the lab and run tests

Afternoon

- Record results and distribute them to the aquarists. The technician and aquarists will work together to solve any problems.

Competitive?

Yes, being a water quality technician in the Aquarium is very competitive. There are few aquariums that have a position for a water quality technician, because it is usually incorporated into another position. However, cities throughout Southern California, have water quality technicians that monitor the freshwater draining to the ocean.

Advice

Get as much experience as possible by volunteering or learning about water quality and basic chemistry on your own. An excellent way to do this is by maintaining an aquarium at home. Talking with a water quality technician is another good way to learn more about the field.