

# WORKING WITH ANIMALS



**ZSL LONDON ZOO 2011-12**

## Why do you want to work with animals?

Working with animals can be very rewarding. You can develop strong bonds with the individuals you work with and can feel a sense of satisfaction if you manage to save, protect, nurse or care for an animal. However, the reality of working with animals is likely to differ from any ideal or imagined reality.

Dealing with the husbandry of an animal can be hard work, both physically and emotionally. They need 24 hour care, every day of the year. You can't switch them off at 5.30pm when the computers get shut down. Remember that many animals also live and die within our life times. You will be need to be able to care for babies, adults and elderly animals in equal

measure. You will need to look after them when you feel tired, ill or upset and will need to do so to a constant high standard.

Ask yourself why you have chosen to find out more about working with animals. Is it something you've always wanted to do? A lifelong ambition? Or are you looking to change careers?

Think about the type of animals you would like to work with. What is it that appeals to you about these animals? What type of work are you interested in doing? Are you interested in caring for, training, exhibiting or farming animals?

Make a list of all the reasons that you would like to work with animals. Circle the reasons that

are for your benefit and which are for the benefit of the animal or its species.

Circle which reasons are personal goals and which are professional goals.

Decide if you can see yourself doing the same sort of job when you are 30, 40 or 60 years of age.



## What type of jobs are there?

There are a number of different job types that involve animals.

Animals are kept as pets and companions, as work animals on farms, as working animals to help the deaf and blind, as farm animals for food, in zoos and

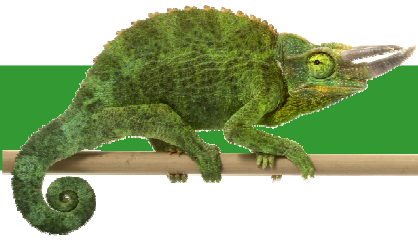
aquaria for educational and conservation purposes, in shows and circuses for entertainment and in safari parks for tourism and conservation.

You may decide you want to show wild animals to tourists by becoming a tour guide, train a guide dog, become a vet or help care for animals in a zoo. Start to decide now which direction would suit you best.

## Working with animals can be divided into different categories:

<b>Surgery and nursing</b>	Vet surgeon, vet nurse, care assistant.
<b>Rescue and rehabilitation</b>	Warden, care assistant, re-homing assistant, physiotherapist.
<b>Animal keeping</b>	Zoo keeper, Aquarist, Stable hand, Bee keeper, Dog walker.
<b>Training</b>	Police animal handler, Seeing and hearing dog trainer, Zoo animal handler.
<b>Conservation</b>	Scientist, Warden, Ranger, Tour guide
<b>Farming</b>	Livestock handler, Stud worker, Dairy hand
<b>Sport</b>	Horse rider, Dog racer, Cat and Dog show exhibiter





### **What type of animals would you like to work with?**

Try and decide which species of animal you'd like to focus on. You can sort animals into broad groups such as large domestic livestock, domestic pets, exotic species (found in zoos) or native wildlife.

Again decide why you want to work with them. Go and visit the place you imagine yourself working, for example a local farm, or a vets surgery. Where possible ask to speak to someone who works there and find out about the reality of the work.

**"I learnt about animal husbandry, nutrition, handling, enrichment, behaviour and so much more" ZSL work experience student 2010**

Take a look at this list and see which animals you can imagine working with:

#### **Animal groups:**

- Domestic farm animals – cow, goat, sheep, pig, chicken, duck
- Domestic pets – cats, dogs, hamsters, rabbits, cage birds
- Working dogs – Alsatian and Labrador dog
- Horses – pony, horse, miniature, toy
- Lab animals – e.g. rodents
- Invertebrates – e.g. bees
- Aquarium species – fish, molluscs (e.g. snails), coral, urchin
- Reptiles – snake, lizard, terrapin
- Large hoofed animals – giraffe, zebra, deer, antelope
- Primates – monkey, ape, lemur
- Small exotic mammals – prairie dog, meerkat, mongoose, coati
- Birds – eagle, hawk, parrot, water birds, ostrich, pheasant, perching birds.



Think about your physical and mental strength. Are you physically strong enough? Are you dedicated enough? Are you willing to train to work with this species?

### **What skills and personal qualities do I need?**

Working with animals is a great career choice for those who are gentle, caring, giving and motivated to do the best for others.

Working with animals requires team work, dedication and good communication skills.

If you work with animals you also work with people. A zoo keeping

team is exactly that. They work together, discuss the daily tasks and co-operate to get all the work done to a high standard.

When working with domestic pets you need to work with the pet owner and in every work place you need to work with other staff and managers.

You need the personal quality to be happy to work on sunny bank holiday Mondays and on Christmas day if required.



## Personal qualities

Many people who work with animals find that they had an interest in animals from a very young age, for example looking in rock pools on holiday, looking in the garden for worms, feeding the birds and finding frogs in ponds. This fascination often extends into a persons career ambitions and helps to guide the types of qualifications they need.

Every career requires a certain set of skills, qualifications and personal qualities. Generally people who work with animals share the similar qualities.

You need to be:

- Communicative
- Positive
- Reliable
- Dedicated
- Caring and giving
- Open to learning new things



## What qualifications do I need?

To work with animals you need to understand what an animal is, its biology, physiology and ecology. You need to understand the needs of the animal in terms of its nutrition, health and hygiene, behaviour and social groupings.

The basic qualification for working with animals is 3 **GCSE's** at grade C or above in Science, Maths and English. You can get a trainee keeper position with these grades.

Biology is an essential subject if you plan to take **A-levels**, along with other options like chemistry, environmental science, geography and physics.

Alternative further education qualifications include the **vocational college** qualifications in:

- Animal care
- Animal management
- Animal health
- Animal welfare and husbandry
- Animal science

There are also specific college qualifications in dog grooming and

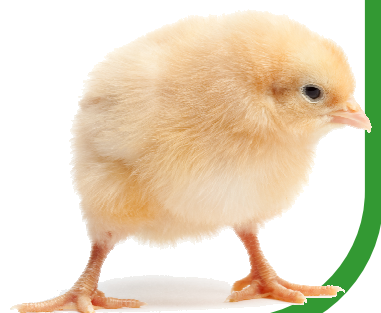
handling, training, equine studies, livestock management and cattery and kennel work. Although many of these modules will form part of a longer qualification in animal care.

**Apprenticeships** are growing in number for anyone age between 14 – 19 years old and allow young people to start work and gain on the job experience whilst still being part of a training course. Investigate the options open to you in your local area by speaking to A-level tutors or college admissions staff.

**Higher education** courses and degrees are available in Zoology, Biology, Environmental sciences, Marine biology and Animal science. HE courses are run from both colleges and universities and provide Level 4 qualifications.

Many colleges and universities have on-site accommodation, so don't worry about trying to find a course in another part of the country as there will be somewhere for you to stay.

*"I learned about the role of keepers and volunteers in the running of the zoo and I know that a career as a vet is my aim"*  
Work experience student 2010





## What qualifications do I need?

There is no one route to getting a job with animals but an interest in science and a science based qualification teamed with work experience is a good place to start. Some zoo keepers have GCSE's as their highest qualification whilst others have a degree and PhD.

Decide if you are planning to do A-levels or a degree. If so make sure that one qualification leads to the

next. For example, doing drama at GCSE won't help you to get your biology A-level and an A-level in French might not help you to get onto a university degree course in zoology. Make a career plan as soon as possible and decide which qualification path will suit your final career.

Here are a few qualification options:

GCSE maths, science and english will lead to

A-levels in biology, chemistry, physics, sports science, etc. From here you can move onto a science based degree in zoology or biology. Alternatively your GCSE's might take you to college to study animal care at Level 2 or level 3, followed by a BSc course at level 4.

Set yourself a challenge and complete your qualifications as soon as possible so that you can start work.

**"I gained additional experience working with a wide range of people and around the public which was fun"**  
**ZSL work experience student 2010**

## Where should I start to look for courses?

Think about where you want to study. In your local area or away from home?

Think about your local area and search for local colleges and universities. Do they deliver the course you need. If not, start to look further afield.

Alternatively, search for a list of Further Education (FE) and Higher Education (HE)

institutions in the UK and look on each website for a list of their courses and qualifications.

You can obtain an on-line or paper prospectus from most colleges and Universities. Ask about both part-time and full-time courses.

Now decide how long would you like to study for. Some courses last for just 1 academic year whilst others last 3 years

or longer. You might even opt for an evening course if you have to work during the day.



## Do I need work experience?

Work experience is not essential for getting a job but it helps. This shows that you are serious about working with animals and gives you a good opportunity to find out about the work environment. When you later go for interviews you can draw on this experience. You can use it to help you to decide which type of

animal and environment you wish to work in.

Whilst studying it's a good idea to try and get work experience.

Work experience could take any of the following forms:

- One day shadowing someone in their work place.

- A full 1 or 2 week block placement where you work for a company or organisation every day.
- An ongoing placement where you attend for 1 day each week over an extended period of time.



## Where can I find work experience?

Many organisations will take students on work placements. Look up your local zoos, vets, farms and give them a call. Alternatively, look on their websites for further information about when they take students on placement and how you need to apply.

Other options for getting experience include packages like 'Keeper for a Day' and 'Zoo Academy' run by some of the larger zoos in the

UK. These experiences will need to be paid for but you will gain a good insight into how the Zoo works, get close to the animals, help with practical tasks and meet people in the business.

The following two books are a great source of ideas and provide the contact details for all the animal related organisations in the UK and Europe.

- **Working with**

**Animals** by Victoria Pybus and

- **Working with the Environment** by Tim Ryder.



## How can I help myself to get a placement?

You will need to put in plenty of effort to find a good placement, especially with the very popular or oversubscribed organisations like the big zoos.

If you wish to stand out from the crowd you need to prepare a good application.

Call the organisation you wish to work for and find out more about what work is available. Send them a letter (not just e-mails) and then follow this up with a phone call. Make sure you call up yourself and don't have a parent do it for you.

Now write a good application. A good application should include the following:

- A little about your qualifications
- Any work experience or other relevant

experience of working with animals

- Why you are applying to that organisation
- What you can offer the organisation
- What you hope to gain from the placement

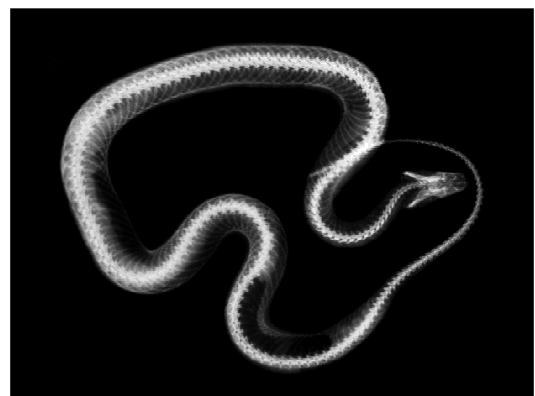
Make sure you write it yourself, design the letter template yourself and try to include your personality in the letter. Keep it to no more than one side of writing. The person reading your letter may be very busy and doesn't have time to read an essay.

If they do like your application they will want to contact you, so ensure you have the full address, postcode, e-mail and phone number on each piece of paper.

Check the spelling, grammar and presentation before you

send it and if you wish to get a reply, always put in a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

*"I now understand a zoo keepers role, what's required and ways to gain such a position"*  
**ZSL work experience student 2010**



## What does a zoo keeper do?

In Britain there are around 350 zoos, safari parks, birds gardens and aquaria, employing around 3,000 members of staff. Working in an animal collection is a question of balancing the needs of the animals and the needs of the public.

Zoo keepers are involved in the everyday husbandry and welfare of the animals in their care. The job is physically demanding and requires a sound knowledge of zoo legislation, animal behaviour, nutrition and health and hygiene. Zoo keepers work as a team and need to be able to communicate with their staff team and keep accurate written records.

### Here is a list of tasks and competencies required of zoo keepers:

- Understand the historical foundations of their animal collection.
- Understand and work within the guidelines of zoo legislation.
- Develop a sound knowledge of normal and abnormal animal behaviours and helping animals to express their natural behaviours.
- Be able to identify animal species and individuals in a group.
- Maintain high levels of hygiene, prevent the spread of diseases and recognise signs of poor health in animals.
- Prepare and deliver nutritionally balanced meals appropriate for each animal.
- Be able to make written records of daily observations to share with other staff.
- Clean and maintain existing animal enclosures.
- Design and develop new and improved animal enclosures.
- Invent new and interesting ways to enrich the lives of the animals to keep them active and occupied.
- Understand how to manage a breeding group of animals and help to ensure the successful rearing of young animals.
- Take an interest in the conservation of animals both in zoos and in the wild.

***“This experience has given me a very clear insight into my future career.”***

**ZSL work experience student 2010**

## How much would I earn as a zoo keeper?

Zoo keeping salaries are generally low. They vary depending on where you live in the country.

Expect to earn between £12,000 - £18,000 as a starting salary, progressing to £20,000 - £25,000 for an experienced keeper.



## Jobs with ZSL

To see all our current vacancies visit our website at:

[www.zsl.org/info/jobs](http://www.zsl.org/info/jobs)

This page lists all the current vacancies for full time work, part time work and internships within the Society.

There are jobs listed for both London Zoo and Whipsnade Zoo, the Institute of Zoology and the Conservation

Programmes team.

Positions at ZSL range from seasonal zoo keeping positions through to senior research scientists. Vacancies may come up for vet nursing, pathology, research scientist, field work scientist, lab assistants, education staff, retail and admission staff, catering staff and animal keeper positions.

Each position requires its own set of qualifications, ranging from GCSE's to PhD's. Each job specification will state what skills and qualifications are required for the position.



## Useful websites

### Zoological Society of London

[www.zsl.org](http://www.zsl.org)

### British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria

[www.biaza.org.uk](http://www.biaza.org.uk)

### Peoples Dispensary for Sick Animals

[www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)

### Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

[www.rspca.org.uk](http://www.rspca.org.uk)

### Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

[www.rspb.org.uk](http://www.rspb.org.uk)

### Guide Dogs

[www.guidedogs.org.uk](http://www.guidedogs.org.uk)

[www.hearingdogs.org.uk](http://www.hearingdogs.org.uk)

### British Veterinary Association

[www.bva.co.uk](http://www.bva.co.uk)

### British Veterinary Nursing Association

[www.bvna.co.uk](http://www.bvna.co.uk)

### LANTRA

[www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

### British Horse Society

[www.bhs.org.uk](http://www.bhs.org.uk)

### Department for the Environment Food and Rural Affairs

[www.defra.gov.uk](http://www.defra.gov.uk)

### Association of British Wild Animal Keepers

[www.abwak.co.uk](http://www.abwak.co.uk)

### Environment Jobs

[www.environmentjob.co.uk](http://www.environmentjob.co.uk)

uk

### Field Studies Council

[www.field-studies-council.org](http://www.field-studies-council.org)

### Books

*Zoo Animals behaviour, management, and welfare.* 2009

Hosey, Melfi and Pankhurst

*An Introduction to Zoo Biology and Management.* 2010

Paul A. Rees

**"I gained confidence both working with animals, communicating with the team and interacting with the public"**  
**Work experience student 2010**



**ZSL LONDON ZOO 2011-12**

ZSL London Zoo  
Regent's Park  
London  
NW1 4RY

Phone: 0844 225 1826  
Web: [www.zsl.org](http://www.zsl.org)



The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) is a charity devoted to conservation and education, the worldwide conservation of animals and their habitats being the key role of the organisation.

Our scientists in the laboratory and field, animal management teams at both zoos and our veterinarians contribute wide-ranging skills and experience to both practical conservation and the scientific research that underpins this work.

We are committed to the principle of equal opportunities in employment. We apply policies that are determined solely by job criteria and personal ability.



No part of the ZSL London Zoo Careers with Animals booklet may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means, either wholly or in part, without prior written permission from ZSL London Zoo Discovery and Learning Department.

Author: Rosie Davison - ZSL London Zoo Education 2011