

KEEPER INTERVIEW – TROPICAL DISCOVERY



First Name & Title: *Larry, Tropical Discovery Zookeeper*

List the animals you are responsible for:

Mainly reptiles, amphibians & fishes, but also some invertebrates and mammals that live in the exhibit.

How many years have you worked at the Denver Zoo? *Since 1992*

How many years have you been a keeper? *Since 1986*

Why did you become a keeper?

I have had a life long interest in animals, nature and natural history and this is a good way to pursue those interests.

What is your background?

I majored in Zoology at Ohio State University. I volunteered at the Toledo Zoo in their Diversity of Life Exhibit and with education animals. I was hired as a keeper at the Indianapolis Zoo, IN. There I worked with most of the animals. Then we moved the zoo to a new location on the other side of town. At the new zoo I worked in the Water's Biome and was primarily in charge of the Amazon Exhibit. When I moved to Denver I worked in Bird World, Primates and the Kraal before I transferred to Tropical Discovery.

Briefly describe your "typical" day or your primary job duties.

First I check all the animals, pumps, filters, etc that I am responsible for that day to make sure all the animal are well and life support systems are working properly. Then I clean glass and exhibits to get ready to open to the public. Later I prepare diets and feed the animals. The rest of the time I'm helping the other keepers and staff with breeding projects, renovating exhibits, and helping the vets as needed.

What do you like most about your job?

I like working with such amazing animals, such as Komodo dragons and Siamese crocodiles. That's something that most people will never get to do.

What is the most difficult part of your job?

It is difficult telling visitors not to bang on the glass or to stop chasing the peacocks.

Tell us something interesting about the animals you work with.

Poison dart frogs are very toxic in the wild. They have poison in their secretion in their skin. Natives in the Amazon use this secretion on their dart tips, hence the name poison dart frogs. However, in captivity these frogs lose their poison. This is because the frogs in the wild get the poison from the tiny insects that they eat.

What advice do you have for students interested in pursuing a career as a zookeeper?

Go to college and get a degree in a biology related field. Volunteer at a zoo, a vet or an animal rehab center, or some other animal related facility. Get as much animal experience as you can. Read as much as you can about animals, nature and the environment.