



Zookeeper Interview - Predators

First Name & Title: An, Animal Keeper – Predators

Why did you become a zookeeper?

I became a zookeeper because I was passionate about animals at a young age. I remember when I was 6 years old, my class was going to the zoo for a field trip. I was super excited because at that time I was only going to the zoo once a year. During the field trip, I knew at that moment I wanted to have this feeling every day. From that day on I worked to become a zookeeper. I worked harder than anybody did because I knew what my goals were and I never forgot it.



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

I have two associates degrees from schools in New Mexico. While I was in college, I volunteered at a zoo about 45 minutes away from my house. I would recommend getting your college degree in any animal sciences, for example, biology, zoology, wildlife biology, etc. To work in a zoo, most facility requires a college degree and animal experience. I recommend volunteering with animals at a young age to get your foot in the door. It does not have to be at a zoo, any experience will help you in the future. Start volunteering at the local dog shelter or a friend's farm.

What is the daily routine like for a zookeeper?

A zookeeper's routine is a lot of cleaning, feeding, training, and being creative. Every day, I clean where the animals live. I want to make sure that there isn't any poop around or old food on the ground. When I am feeding the animals, we try to incorporate training. Training is very important for a lot of reasons. We train the animals for many husbandry behaviors, if we need to check on their bellies, we can ask them to stand up on their legs, or if we notice them gaining some weight, we can ask them to run on a wheel to get some exercise.

Being creative is a huge part of a zookeeper's daily routine. Zookeepers give out enrichment to the animals every day. Enrichment is anything that stimulates an animal or encourages them to engage in natural behaviors. I try to be creative with the enrichment I give to the animals. I want to make sure it is not the same item repeatedly, so when I give an enrichment item I will modify it by adding a new aspect to it or drilling a hole into the enrichment to make it different in some way.





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What is the hardest part of your job?

The hardest part about being a zookeeper is when an animal passes away. Death is going to happen because animals can get sick or they get old. When an animal passes away, I know I gave them the best care I could give.

What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is being around the animals and knowing I could make a difference for them. There are a couple of ways I make a difference for them. One way is to make enrichment that they will use. What's more rewarding is when you put all of your time into building a relationship with an animal, and they come up to you to greet you after you have been working with them for months.

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

In the Village Hall or Pavilion section of Toyota Elephant Passage, I have many different species of animals. This specific section has carnivores, birds, reptiles, primates, and some fish. The food we feed them could be fruit, vegetable, pellets, Jell-O, fish and a variety of meat. Each animal has a very specific diet. We also weigh all the diets to make sure the animals are eating their diet and to make sure they are not getting overweight.

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

The most beneficial classes I took were biology and math. Biology made me appreciate the circle of life and how nature works. Math is important because we use this every day in zoo keeping.

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

Work as hard as you can on your goal. Nothing is given to you, so you must go and get it!

