

ZOOKEEPER



SALARY

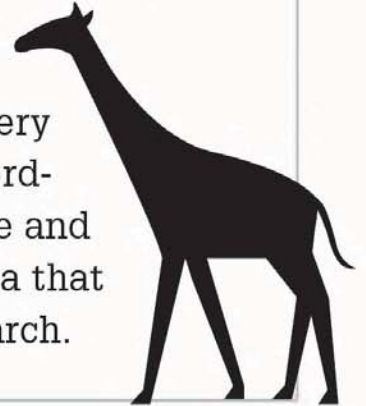
Zookeeper ★★★★★
Head keeper ★★★★★

INDUSTRY PROFILE

Strong competition for entry-level positions • More applicants than vacancies • Higher salaries offered in larger zoos

JOB DESCRIPTION

A zookeeper looks after wild, rare, and exotic animals in zoos, animal parks, or aquariums. In this active, often outdoor job, duties range from feeding, washing, and grooming animals to designing and maintaining enclosures, assisting with the delivery of medical care to animals, and record-keeping. Zookeepers may also guide and educate zoo visitors, and collect data that may be useful in conservation research.



CAREER PATHS

Experience working with animals is required in order to become a zookeeper. Prospective zookeepers can pick up useful skills by joining volunteer programs, offered by most zoos and animal parks, or through voluntary or paid work in a pet store, stable, or farm. Senior roles are rare, so progression usually requires moving to another zoo.

VOLUNTEER Although you will not always have direct contact with animals as a volunteer, you can still gain valuable experience of working in a zoo environment. These opportunities are very popular, so you may have to join a waiting list.

APPRENTICE You can gain useful experience by taking a related college course or applying for an apprenticeship, both of which may involve direct contact with animals.



GRADUATE You will need a degree in zoology, biology, or a related field in order to progress to a senior or more specialized position in this profession.



ZOOKEEPER Once you have gained experience you may be able to join—or apply for promotion at—a larger zoo, where there may be good prospects for progression. Opportunities also exist in education and conservation research.

SKILLS GUIDE



Excellent observational skills for spotting physical and behavioral signs of injury or illness in animals.



The ability to keep detailed records in a diary or on a computer for monitoring and research purposes.



Physical strength for lifting and handling equipment and working in wet and dirty conditions.



Strong team-working skills to interact with other keepers, vets, and animal specialists.



Good communication skills to give demonstrations and educational talks to visitors.



SENIOR KEEPER Leads a team of zookeepers and volunteers, overseeing the care and welfare of the animals at the zoo.



KEEPER Specializes in the care of one type or group of animals, such as reptiles or primates. Keepers may travel widely, giving advice to zoos and animal collections around the world.



ANIMAL CURATOR Sources and acquires new animals for zoos to maintain their collections and help with breeding programs.



ANIMAL PARK MANAGER Runs the daily operations and services of an animal park. A park manager also guides tourists and is responsible for the care and welfare of the animals.

RELATED CAREERS

- ▶ **ECOLOGIST** *see pp. 172–173*
- ▶ **PET STORE ASSISTANT** Cares for mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish to be sold as pets. Pet store assistants also sell food, hutches, cages, and equipment, and give advice to customers.
- ▶ **SAFARI TOUR LEADER** Guides parties of tourists on safari-park tours so that they can see wild animals and birds in their natural habitat. Tour leaders track the animals, transport tourists to them, and ensure the safety of the group.
- ▶ **WILDLIFE REHABILITATOR** Rescues sick and abandoned wild animals, and nurses them back to health with the ultimate aim of releasing them back into their natural environments.

AT A GLANCE



YOUR INTERESTS Wildlife and animal behavior • Biology • Geography • English • Mathematics • Information Technology (IT)



ENTRY QUALIFICATIONS A good general education, work experience, and commitment are required. A degree is needed for specialized roles.



LIFESTYLE Shift-work is the norm, but part-time working may be possible. Head keepers will often work evenings while on call.



LOCATION The job is usually based at public and private zoos, animal parks, or aquariums. Travel may be necessary when transporting animals.



THE REALITIES Outdoor work in all weathers is often required. Some jobs may aggravate allergies to animals or plants. Some animals pose safety risks.