What is a zookeeper?

An animal caretaker or zookeeper is someone who cares for animals in zoological parks or aquariums. They care for a wide variety of animals from mammals and birds, to reptiles and amphibians to fish and invertebrates (animals without backbones). Some keepers become highly specialized, concentrating on a specific group of animals, such as great apes, birds, pachyderms or reptiles.

What exactly does a keeper do?

Zookeepers work hard! They are always on the go, and they work every day of the year, including weekends, holidays - even when the weather outside is terrible. On a daily basis Animal Care staff is responsible for:

- **Diet preparation**: This includes preparing animal diets, making sure each animal gets proper nutrients and if necessary, medications.
- **Habitat maintenance**: If you want to be a keeper, be ready to get dirty! Maintenance includes scrubbing, hosing and otherwise cleaning habitats.
- **Training and Enrichment**: Keepers care deeply about the health of their animals. Through training we can enhance animal welfare, reduce stress during scheduled health checks, and ensure our animals stay healthy.
- **Public speaking**: The keepers share the Zoo’s mission of connecting people and wildlife through keeper chats, behind the scenes tours and other presentations.

Check out these video links for more information:

- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Animal Nutrition Center
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Classroom Safari
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Otter Behavior Training
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Gorilla Enrichment
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Zebra Well-check
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Stingray Training
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Zoo Library
- Wildlife and Wild Places with Tom Stalf: Silverback Gorilla Health Check
- Becoming a Zoo Vet - Dr. Jimmy Johnson Interview

What qualifications do I need to become a keeper?

Whether you are interested in working with gorillas or snakes, training in some area of biology is required. Caring for wildlife in zoo settings is very complex and involves many different fields. Modern zoos work to conserve threatened and endangered species, from the large to the small, both on the zoo grounds and in their range countries.
Jobs in zoos and aquariums are very competitive. To get a permanent position, you need a combination of experience and education.

**EXPERIENCE:** People with hands-on experience have an edge. Volunteering is a great way to get experience. Some places you can consider volunteering are: a veterinarian office, animal training classes (for example, dog training classes), local Humane Society, other local animal shelter, the Ohio Wildlife Center and even here at the Zoo! Did you know we offer a [teen volunteer](#) program? If you are a college student you can also look into internship experiences at the Zoo.

**EDUCATION:** To get a permanent position nowadays, it is required that you have a college degree in a biology-related field. According to our Human Resources team, zookeeper positions require the following: Bachelor’s degree in zoology, animal science, biology or relevant field required. Minimum six months animal husbandry experience working with primates, reptiles, carnivores, herbivores and birds preferred. Aspiring animal caretakers take many of the same courses needed for acceptance into veterinary school. However, majors in general biology, animal behavior, or zoology are preferred by zoos, as well as hands on experience working with animals.

**What other jobs can you get at a zoo?**

Keep in mind, though, that within a zoo or aquarium, only 37% of the year-round employees work in the animal areas. Careers in non-animal areas include:

- **Education** – Presents on grounds and off grounds programs to enhance guest experience and engage people in conservation action
- **Human Resources** – Implements programs, policies and strategies for Zoo team members and recruits new employees
- **Security** – Preserves the safety of persons and assets at Zoo properties
- **Purchasing** – Controls inventory operations, such as ordering products and services for Zoo
- **Animal Nutrition** – Orders and prepares food for the animals
- **Conservation** – Participates in and supports conservation programs worldwide
- **Planning and Design** – Designs and develops long-term construction projects, art work, program planning, exhibits and graphics
- **Philanthropy** – Directs donor relations and fundraising
- **Technology Services** – Maintains information technology, including servers, networks, routers, phones, software, databases, etc.
- **Marketing and Sales** – Promotes ticket sales through advertising opportunities and special events
- **Guest Services** – Oversees revenue generating activities such as catering, retail, food and beverage, and more
- **Facilities** – Maintains the physical properties - includes, horticulture, ride maintenance, plumbers, carpenters, electricians and other types of trade maintenance
- **Community Relations** – Drives attendance and membership with promotional material, publications and other forms of communication

**Where can I find more information?**

Other websites you might find helpful are:

- [American Association of Zoo Keepers (AAZK)](#)
- [Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA)](#)
- [Columbus Zoo and Aquarium Jobs Page](#)