



ASAB Careers Case Study

Qualified Keeper

Jo Shirley - ZSL Whipsnade Zoo

What are the main duties of your job?

Training California sea lions for husbandry and show purposes. General husbandry of the sea lions and Asian short clawed otters which included water quality maintenance, feeding, enrichment, cleaning and enclosure maintenance. Also trained the otters for husbandry purposes for examples, recall, crate, target, scale.

What was your career path to get this job?

Worked on a farm for three years whilst at school, did Zoology at University of Nottingham and carried out work experience at Whipsnade during my studies, got offered a seasonal job at Woburn Safari Park once graduated and then a seasonal position at Whipsnade Zoo on the Flying Bird team. From there I was offered a Trainee Keeper position on the Sea lion Team and completed my Level 3 DMZAA course to become a Qualified Keeper.

What are the best bits of your job?

The interaction with the sea lions definitely as they become part of your family. Training complicated behaviours such as conscious blood draw and hand injections and having to problem solve the steps to take based on the individual's behaviour. Having trained a hand injection with an elderly sea lion enabled me to hand inject her with anaesthetic prior to being put to sleep so she was not stressed during the last moments of her life from being darted.

And the most challenging parts?
Smelling of fish all of the time?!



My friends think I... have the best job but wish I was free at the weekends more!

My family thinks I... sit and play with sea lions all day.

I actually... spend too much of my day doing water quality tasks!

What kind of progression opportunities are there? All the way up the keeper progression line to senior, lead, team leader. The skills and qualifications you gain could allow you to work abroad.

What was your best single day at work? Moving all of the sea lions from London Zoo to Whipsnade Zoo after having relocated them for their pool and water system to be updated. We had a few weeks to re-train them in not so ideal conditions, they all crated and loaded voluntarily and perfectly.

When you tell people what you do for a living, they usually say ... You have the best job in the world

Average salary for this role
£24,000

Describe in three words the kind of person that would suit this job?
Confident, patient & a trouble shooter

