

So you think you'd like to work with animals! Job Hunting In The Animal World

By
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There are lots of jobs involved with animals and especially with herps but getting into them is not always easy. In some instances education is the key while with others it's a matter of volunteering your time week after week until a position becomes available. If you are conscientious, reliable and good at the job then you will likely be offered a permanent position eventually. A lot of people think it is a glamorous job working with animals, they may be able to show them to the public giving mini talks and displays and the animals are cute, cuddly, or just generally nice. This is the public side to the job, but there is a lot more involved not seen by the public. Behind the scenes there is a lot you need to learn about before you even think of taking on one of these types of jobs.

There are cages to be cleaned, animals that can and will bite, peck, scratch and kick you and they make a mess. Faeces and urine can't be left around as it smells and brings disease. Old leaves need to be removed from cages, food bowls cleaned and water dishes need to be cleaned and disinfected, and kept topped up with fresh clean water. The prime part of animal care jobs is exactly that, cleaning and maintenance! If you are still interested then read on – I will try and give you some information on the types of courses and positions available in New South Wales.

Whether it is a private concern or government *all employers will have normal, office type positions* that require you to be proficient at using computers, answering phones and processing paperwork. Most parks have a souvenir shop where you will have to deal with customers; keep shelves clean and stocked with saleable items. Staff is required to work at entry positions into parks and wildlife centres, taking money, giving receipts and information about the park.

Breeding Animals For A Living

Animals: Breeding animals or reptiles for a living is an option but if you think it is going to be easy, think again. You will need to research the market well to find out what types of animals you will need to breed, how to market your products, and the viability of the project i.e. can you make a living from it. Depending on the area where these animals are going to be housed, you will need council approval. The Department of agriculture may need to be consulted for relevant licences. There may be other regulations to consider and the set up alone could cost thousands of dollars before you start. You will then need to acquire 'quality' animals to breed and this will be another expense. The animals will have to be fed, cleaned, and generally will have to be looked after 7 days a week 52 weeks a year. Taking holidays or a few days off can create difficulties unless you have a reliable person to look after things for you.

Breeding Reptile Food: There are a number of places that breed insects and rodents to be used as food for other animals or research purposes. You could apply for a job at one of these places or maybe start your own (see breeding animals above). Some of these include such creatures as crickets, meal worms, roaches, mice and rats. These are manual, repetitive jobs that require cages, food and water containers to be cleaned, fresh substrate added, animals culled and new breeding cages to be set up. Even many Zoo's have their own food production houses! TAFE animal care and husbandry courses are appropriate for this field.

Conservation

This covers a wide variety of activities including captive breeding programs run by zoos, fieldwork in Australia or foreign countries to educating the public about the importance of protecting native species. Usually a degree from University is required for paid work in these areas; environmental science, natural science, wildlife conservation/management biology. Volunteer work can get you noticed and goes some way to helping you in this field.

Department of Environment and Conservation: *Parks and Wildlife Division*; this department does not deal primarily with animals it is a law enforcement agency. **RANGER:** This position includes fire fighting related activities, (very physically demanding), requiring heavy muscular activity, lifting, carrying, pushing, and pulling loads, bending, climbing, and driving a variety of vehicles. Rangers must meet the requirements of a specific medical with a clearance to undertake the fitness test to a moderate level, and task based physical assessment in order to undertake this position, You will need to obtain certification at the appropriate level prior to undertaking fire fighting/incident control duties.

This is a diverse position where you will be required to manage projects and the implementation of policies, procedures and legislative requirements to protect the natural, Aboriginal and historic heritage directly in the field. This includes wildlife protection, ecological restoration and direct park management through visitor management, weed and feral animal control, bushfire suppression, planning and implementing facility improvements and maintenance. You may need to operate a variety of equipment and vehicles, supervise staff, volunteers or contractors/consultants.

You will need a degree or equivalent relevant to the field operations of the Department and be able to work within the guidelines and obligations of the Department. Have effective communications skills, both oral and written. A current driver's licence and ability to operate four wheel drive vehicles. Be organised, willing to fly in light aircraft and be involved in incident management duties (including fire fighting). Capacity and willingness to exercise, delegated authority for law enforcement. This is diverse, complex but rewarding career that requires you to be a 'jack' of all trades.

Pet Industry

Shops: These shops have a variety of stock to cover all types of animals. Some only cater to the usual dogs, cats, birds and fish and all the associated products that go along with these types of animals. Yet others cater for a wider variety of animals such as rats and mice, reptiles and all their requirements. Currently reptiles are not permitted to be sold in pet shops in NSW but they do have caging, and associated products, such as specialised heating equipment, water bowls, hides, branches and other products. You will be required to clean floors, cages, stock! Keep shelves clean and tidy. Look after the animals held in care and on occasioning perhaps take animals home to mind overnight. You will be required to talk to be a good communicator and salesperson and be able to talk to customers and sell products. TAFE runs basic 'animal care' courses that would be advantages if you would like to get into this industry (see TAFE Courses this article)

Photography:

Nature Photography: This is a rewarding field, but to make a living in this area requires an eye for your subject. Patience is a requirement that you must have as you can spend hours lying/sitting still just to get that one perfect shot, unfortunately most animals can't be posed.

Studio Photography: Photography in a studio is a different field again. Either at a studio or as a mobile photographer following dog, cat shows, etc is another avenue and is a

completely different field. These animals can be posed and it is just a matter of click, click, click, with your camera to get the best shots.

Many colleges offer courses in photography.

Research

Research institutions such as the CSIRO, universities and the like require animal carers to assist them during this work and maintain their animals in optimum health. Much of this work involves the advancement of science such as a better understanding of disease and the treatments etc. Qualifications for this work can be obtained through TAFE and Animal Technology Dept of Bio Sciences. There are some research facilities around the country, this is a specialised field and depending on what is being studied and for what reason the qualifications needed to acquire a job at one of these facilities. If you are interested in this type of work you can contact the CSIRO.

TAFE Courses

Most TAFE courses don't require an application, you enrol on enrolment day at the particular college where the course is available but you will need to discuss this with the particular college and check they are running the course you require. All courses attract a fee and you will need to discuss this with the TAFE College. A 'Companion Animal Services' course and other 'Animal Care and Husbandry' courses are available at some TAFE colleges only. A lot of these are traineeship courses and you will need to be employed in the industry along with other criteria to apply. Some are full time or part time (day or evening) depending on the college running the course. You will develop skills for providing the daily care of a variety of animals including feeding, maintaining hygiene, maintaining housing, grooming, observing animals and ensuring their safety. You will also acquire the skills necessary for contact with the public to provide information on products and services. **Requirements:** You will usually need a variety of qualifications before you can begin. Selection criteria will be based on the level of education previously attained, work experience, either paid or unpaid, life and community experiences. You will need to discuss this with the TAFE College. **Contact Details:** TAFE NSW Information Centre at 47 York St Sydney 2000 Phone: 131 601. www.tafensw.edu.au

Television

There are a number of shows on TV that have animal segments or are totally devoted to animals. This is a limited field, but who knows you could be the next Dr Harry! You will need to have an outgoing personality and good presentation to acquire one of these positions.

University Courses

There are science based University courses applicable to the animal field from Zoology to biology. You will need to check which universities are running these courses and the high school pass level required to enter the university. There are a number of positions available in these courses for mature age students and the educational requirements are not as stringent.

Veterinary Field

Nurse: To become a Veterinary nurse you need to secure a job at a veterinary surgery or practice and attend relevant courses at TAFE. You will need to feed animals, clean cages, and wash floors and in some practices answer phones and keep records of payments, patient care and other clerical work. You may need to assist with operations and procedures on the patients and cater to all the specific nursing needs of hospitalised patients. Currently veterinary nursing education in NSW can be done at TAFE where a Cert 4 level of training can be acquired. There are also veterinary nursing diploma courses available, though these are aimed more at acquiring nursing management skills. |

Technician: As for vet nurse you will need to have completed school to year --- and then attended University/TAFE to acquire the skills to operate oxygen, X-ray machines and assist in operations on the animals. Veterinary technicians courses are currently only run from Qld. They can be done by correspondence.

Veterinarian: Schooling requires a high pass at the year 12 levels and a course at University for 4-5 years. (See University Courses) There are many branches of veterinarian care you can go into such as large animals i.e. cattle, sheep, horses etc. Small animals i.e. cats and dogs, while other more specialised areas might cover exotic small animals (rabbits, ferrets, etc), birds and reptiles. General practices in the metropolitan area cater mostly to cats and dogs, i.e. most companion animals. Some practices cover reptiles but they are few and far between with a lot of vets preferring not to treat them at all, especially venomous snakes. This is a highly specialised field and requires a lot of dedication by those involved to branch out into areas like reptiles Not all veterinarians work in private practice. Many go into research, agribusiness, farming, teaching, marketing and other fields.

Wildlife Parks

Wildlife parks have a diverse range of animals which all need to be looked after. Most people volunteer their time either during the week or at weekends, doing anything that they can to gain experience and getting themselves known.

Writing

Books/Publications You will need to have a sound knowledge on the subject you wish to write about. Excellent research resources and there is no guarantee that at the end you will sell your book, or that if it does you will make much money. I think I would be correct in saying there is no-one in Australia who makes a living entirely from writing and producing books on animals and particularly reptiles and amphibians – this could probably cover the world. You would need to sell many thousands of books and would continually need to produce more to make a viable career. Publishing is usually a great way to share your knowledge and ideas but extremely limited.

Zoos

See wildlife parks. Due to the nature of Zoos and the wide range of animals you are likely to be assigned to a particular area caring for a particular type of animal. i.e. reptiles, macropods, birds, water animals, etc. Zookeeper's courses through TAFE, etc. exist but require you to be employed in the industry before being able to enrol.

Other Options

There are many other options available such as farming, wildlife rehabilitation. There are now paid positions within some wildlife aid agencies such as WIRES. Designing clothing

with animals painted or embroidered on them. Art – posters, paintings, the possibilities are limited only by the imagination. Pottery – making mugs dishes etc with reptiles painted on them or moulded onto them. Ornaments for house or garden, the list goes on. Some of these options mean you don't have to handle the animals but you will need style and fair with some of these options to compete in a small specialised market.

Final

No matter what type of job involves animals it can be dirty, boring, repetitive and sometimes dangerous work. There can be long hours involved and usually weekends. There are consolations, though, the animals can be very rewarding and seeing sick animals get better or newborn animals grow into healthy adults are great rewards. If you have no illusions and are prepared to work hard towards your goal then one of these jobs are probably for you. This article is only meant as guide to get you started, you may be able to think of other avenues where you can work directly or indirectly with animals and make a living. Whatever course you take for all those who are leaving school or looking for a new career, we wish you well.

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