

KansasCityZoo.org
Phone: 816.595.1234
Fax: 816.595.1798
Address: 6800 Zoo Dr
Kansas City, MO 64132



OUR VISION & MISSION

Vision

The Kansas City Zoo—with its world-class exhibits and exceptional programs—attracts visitors from around the world and families from close to home.

Mission

The Kansas City Zoo connects people to each other and the natural world to promote understanding, appreciation, and conservation.

About

The Kansas City Zoo, a private, non-profit organization, is operated in agreement with the Kansas City, MO Board of Parks and Recreation Commissioners, partially funded by the Zoological District and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Keeper FAQ

So, you want to be a keeper?

It's hard to find someone who doesn't like animals, and many, many people want to work with them. So, if you really want to pursue this career, how do you go about it? Here are answers to the frequently asked questions we get about becoming an animal keeper.

Education and experience are especially necessary for all of our animal positions. They are highly competitive and require skilled individuals who usually have a background in a related life science field such as biology, zoology, or conservation sciences.

Being a keeper looks like a lot of fun. Is it?

People often have the image of a keeper only holding and cuddling an adorable baby, such as a penguin or cheetah. But there is much more to the job—animals are not just cute, cuddly things. Working with animals can be dangerous, and there is injury potential to keepers and animals. You need to keep up with the latest safety precautions and training on zoonotic disease prevention. The work can be hard, dirty, and tedious. You should have a realistic view of the job before making animal keeping your career objective.

Is it easy to get a keeper position?

Like any other popular job, there are more applicants than open positions, especially when it comes to big zoos like the Kansas City Zoo. Competition is stiff, and one must be persistent and patient before a position may even open up. It's not unusual for our Human Resources Department to receive hundreds of applications—including existing zoo employees—for one animal care job opening. And those applicants still have to compete with applicants who are already keepers at other Zoos around the world.



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How do I become an animal keeper?

There is no single way to become a keeper, but the more education and hands-on experience you have, the better.

Education – While you're in school, learn as much as you can in your science classes. In college, choose a degree program in animal-related fields like biology, zoology, botany, ecology, conservation science, or animal behavior. Take as many different courses in those areas as you can, and graduate with a bachelor's degree in your chosen field. (Here's a BIG hint: the competition for jobs caring for animals is so strong that you really HAVE to have a college degree these days to be considered).

Hands-on Experience – Find opportunities to work with animals. Some potential keepers have volunteered assisting Conservation Research scientists and technicians. Sometimes work-study opportunities are available for college students.

What are some other ways to gain animal experience?

Some places to look for volunteer jobs or internships might be:

- Veterinary offices
- Animal training classes (does your dog need obedience training?)
- Local Humane Society
- Local Park Service
- Wildlife rehabilitation centers (like those for wolves, bears, big cats, birds of prey, and even bats)
- Animal shelters
- Farms (for domestic animals, or even ostrich, llama, or butterfly farms)
- Pet breeders (those that breed specific kinds of dogs, cats, or horses)
- Horse stables and boarding facilities
- 4-H Clubs

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Does it help to work in another capacity at the Kansas City Zoo, such as an entry-level position?

It certainly doesn't hurt. There are many instances of former employees of the Zoo's admissions, food service stands, or ride operations moving into animal-care positions. Just remember: these people also had the proper educational background and may have even obtained some animal-care experience or had hands-on experience working with animals.

What type of person makes a good keeper?

Besides education and some experience, attitude and personality play big roles, as well as a good work ethic, a positive attitude about themselves and work, good communication skills with both people and animals, and the ability to be innovative enough to find solutions to keep the animals stimulated.

Are there other jobs at the Zoo that will allow me to work with animals?

There sure are! Veterinarians, animal health technicians, and zoo educators work directly with animals.

I like animals and want to work at a zoo, but not as a keeper. What other jobs are there?

If it's your dream to work at a zoo, don't limit yourself to one thing. Find out what you're good at, and find a way to use those skills, to help wildlife. You can get a college degree in lots of different fields and find a job at a zoo or conservation program that needs your skills. Keep in mind that most people who work at a zoo don't work with animals, and only about 10 percent of the jobs that open up include contact with animals. Some job examples include: accountant, security officer, horticulturist, secretary, mechanic, computer programmer, graphic designer, human resources staff member, or merchandising buyer. To learn more about other open positions at the zoo, please visit our [Employment Opportunities Page](#).

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Where can I get a “zoo” degree?

There are three associates degree programs in the nation designed to teach students to be professional animal keepers or trainers:

- Moorpark College, Moorpark, California
- Pensacola Junior College, Pensacola, Florida
- Santa Fe Community College, Gainesville, Florida

Bachelor's degrees in zoo and animal science are offered at:

- Friends University, Wichita, Kansas
- Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas
- Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
- Missouri Western State University, St. Joseph, Missouri
- Missouri State University, Columbia, Missouri
- University of Central Missouri, Warrensburg, Missouri

Your favorite search engine can help you find more information on schools that offer animal-related topics and degrees. Good Luck!

To get even more information about a career as a zoo keeper, visit the American Association of Zoo Keepers' website. If you are interested in more information about a career as a zoo veterinarian, visit the American Association of Zoo Veterinarians website.