



MINDI SCOTT

ZOOKEEPER, ASIA QUEST, ELEPHANT/RHINO

1. When did you begin working at the Columbus Zoo?

I began working at the Columbus Zoo in 1998 as a seasonal team member, and I became a full-time employee in 2008.

2. What education and animal experiences helped you secure a job in Animal Care?

I have a Bachelor's of Science degree in Zoology. I also worked with big cats and canids at an exotic animal rescue before working here at the Zoo as a seasonal in different animal areas (Herbivore/ Carnivore, Asia Quest, Pachyderms). I have worked with a large number of species of mammals, birds, and a few reptiles.

3. What skills are the most important in your job?

Good communication skills, problem solving skills, time management, flexibility (your day/ plans can change at any point), and good observation skills are all very important.

4. What is a typical day for your current position?

On a typical day, we start by checking all of the animals, feeding them, and shifting them around so that cleaning can begin. We have a quick meeting to discuss the plan for the day before moving on. Once our seasonals are working on cleaning habitat spaces, we begin training sessions. These can be anywhere from basic husbandry sessions to check their feet, mouths, and skin to mock blood collections or injections. We will move animals to their public habitats when the spaces are ready and then we prepare for the Elephant Bath tour that we do every day for guests who have registered to participate. After the tour, we will move animals again and feed out more hay before lunch. After lunch, we have another short meeting to discuss what our plan is as far as set up for the night and more training that needs to be done. We will then feed out more hay, shift animals, clean stalls and habitats, and do more training. We also take time to put training, enrichment, and observations into our daily records on the computer. About 1-1 ½ hours before we leave, we move the animals to the areas where they will spend the night and give them their hay for the evening. The last thing we do before we leave is double-check everything.

5. What advice would you give me to help me work in Animal Care?

Zookeeping can be very competitive, so be prepared to work hard, possibly for years, to get experience before getting a full-time job. It worked out for me to stay at one zoo my whole career, but most people are also willing to move around and get experience at different zoos. Keep an open mind as well! Originally, I wanted to

work with big cats, but over time, I realized that I loved working with hoofstock and pachyderms more than I ever did with big cats.

6. How does this career impact your personal and lifestyle choices?

Keepers work weekends, holidays, late shifts, and early shifts. It can be hard to see family and friends for holidays and special events. Working with large animals like elephants and rhinos is also exhausting, which sometimes makes it hard to want to do things after a work day.

7. What is the hardest part of your job?

Losing the animals that I have built relationships with over years is definitely the hardest part. The job is also physically, mentally, and emotionally demanding, which is very hard.

8. What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is developing relationships with the animals and getting to work so closely with them on a daily basis. Some people never get to see an elephant or rhino in person, whereas I get to spend part of my life with them. I try to never take that for granted. The relationships I have with the animals here are unlike any others in my life.

9. Does the work you do at the Zoo impact the animals around the world?

Yes. Working with pachyderms (especially rhinos), really made me fall in love with them. Through our local chapter of the American Association of Zookeepers (AAZK), I have helped organize a fundraiser for rhino conservation called Bowling for Rhinos (BFR). In the 10 years that I have been involved with BFR, we have raised more than \$50,000 for conservation projects in Africa and Asia. We have also worked with researchers and graduate students on different projects related to health, reproduction, identification, and Elephant Endotheliotropic Herpesvirus (EEHV) research. These projects not only help us understand and better care for elephants and rhinos in our zoos but all over the world and in their native ranges as well.

10. What is the most important thing you do for the well-being of the animals in your care?

The most important thing I do for the animals in my care is provide everything they need for their mental and physical wellbeing. Good husbandry care (foot and skin care, visual exams, baths), training, enrichment, and social interaction are just a few examples.

ZOO KEEPER INTERVIEWS

