



SYDNEE FENN TERRESTRIAL KEEPER, SHORES & AQUARIUM

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

I started working as a seasonal team member in the Heart of Africa region in August 2021. I became a full-time Terrestrial Zookeeper in the Zoo's Shores & Aquarium region in August 2022.

2. What education and animal experiences helped you become a zookeeper?

I graduated from Bowling Green State University with my Bachelor of Science degree in Biology. While I attended college, I volunteered in their marine lab and reptile lab. After graduation, I completed the Animal Care Behavioral Observation Internship here at the Columbus Zoo.

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

My observation skills are one I use on a daily basis. It helps me with decision making and figuring out what is in the best interest of the animals I care for. Communication skills are also important; you always want to be able to communicate with your co-workers about anything you may want more insight on or just to make sure that everyone is on the same page when it comes to the animals' care.

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

About 80 percent of my day is spent cleaning. Other than cleaning, I get to observe the animals in their habitat and see how I can enhance their wellbeing, or I spend time building more of a relationship with those in my primary care, which I mostly do by training them.

5. What advice would you give me to help me become a zookeeper?

Start volunteering and gaining as much experience as you can, as soon as you can! You can volunteer in a zoo or wildlife center, which are both great places to start. Internships would be my next step in order to gain knowledge in this field.

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

This career has shown me that respect and empathy goes a long way—not just for the animals, but for your co-workers, too. Everything you do affects those around you, and that is something I keep in mind constantly.

7. What is the hardest part of your job?

As much as I would like to try, I will never become an expert on every single reptile I work with. Honestly, it makes me happy that I will never know everything about them because that allows for more growth and learning opportunities.

8. What is the best part of your job?

The best part of my job is getting to live out a dream that I have had since I was a kid. I have wanted to work with animals all of my life, and I feel like my younger self would be so happy to know that my dream became my reality.

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

Of course! From the normal day-to-day activities to breeding projects, everything we do makes an impact. Caring for these animals here at the Zoo and providing our guests with the opportunity to see them makes a more personal connection. In the end, it gives people more of a reason as to why they should care about these reptiles, too.

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

I learn best from watching, so I would say that observing the animals would be the most important thing I do. These reptiles have their own special way of letting me know what they need. When I see this, it allows me to take their own actions into account when I think about their wellbeing.

ZOO KEEPER INTERVIEWS

