



PRIYA BAPODRA-VILLVERDE, SENIOR VETERINARIAN

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

I became a full time veterinarian in 2012.

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

I sought out many different animal-based experiences prior to applying to veterinary school – dairy farm, pet practice, equine surgery referral center, even a slaughterhouse. I believe that those experiences and expected grades in high school were what resulted in me getting a place at veterinary college.

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

Empathy, patience, creative thinking, and communication skills are extremely important in this role.

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

Animal Health staff arrive at 7 a.m., and we start the day with a team meeting at 7:30 a.m. during which we discuss the procedures and animal checkups scheduled for the day. From there, veterinarians and veterinary technicians work through their tasks and procedures for the day. The afternoons can be quiet, and this gives us a time to do desk work, which is also extremely vital such as entering clinical records, dispensing medications, and working on projects.

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

Get a lot of exposure to veterinary work well before being in veterinary school to help you make sure that it is really something that you want to do as your career. That strong desire and passion will help get you through any bumps along the way, which we have all encountered. Sadly, there is no way around this one, but you do need to have decent/good grades to get into veterinary college. Classes can be academically challenging; therefore, it is important to know that you will need to be prepared for this.

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

Being a veterinarian is a vocation, not just a 9-5 job. Especially working in the zoo field, there are no “on call” services that will take calls for you. So, we commit to providing 24/7 care, 365 days a week. There are times where you may need to

miss a family/parenting commitment, work on a holiday, or stay at work for almost 24 hours. It is important to know these expectations, and to try and surround yourself with understanding friends and family, who will support you when needed. Even if you end up working in an aspect of the veterinary field which does not require long hours or any overnight coverage, the work can be emotional and tiring. Making sure that you learn to take time for yourself and enjoying hobbies is important.

7. What is the hardest part of your job?

Losing animals is never easy, but seeing the impact of this on our colleagues and Animal Care staff is harder. It can sometimes be challenging to juggle all the required needs of being a zoo veterinarian, but that is also a reason I love the job.

8. What is the best part of your job?

I cannot express enough how awesome it is to just see these amazing animals every day, let alone be responsible for helping to keep them healthy. Every day is different, and I still experience or learn something new almost every day.

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

Absolutely! By keeping healthy animals here in Columbus, Ohio, we are sustaining populations of endangered animals, which is not only maintaining genetics of these species but also providing our guests with the opportunity to learn and interact with them. Connecting people with animals and nature hopefully empowers visitors to learn a little more about why that species may be threatened in their native range, and what they may be able to do to help them. We are also still learning so much about many of these species and diseases/illnesses that may affect them. Therefore, what we learn by treating them in a zoo setting can often to be used to help populations in their native habitats.

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

We keep them as healthy as possible!!

ZOO KEEPER INTERVIEWS

