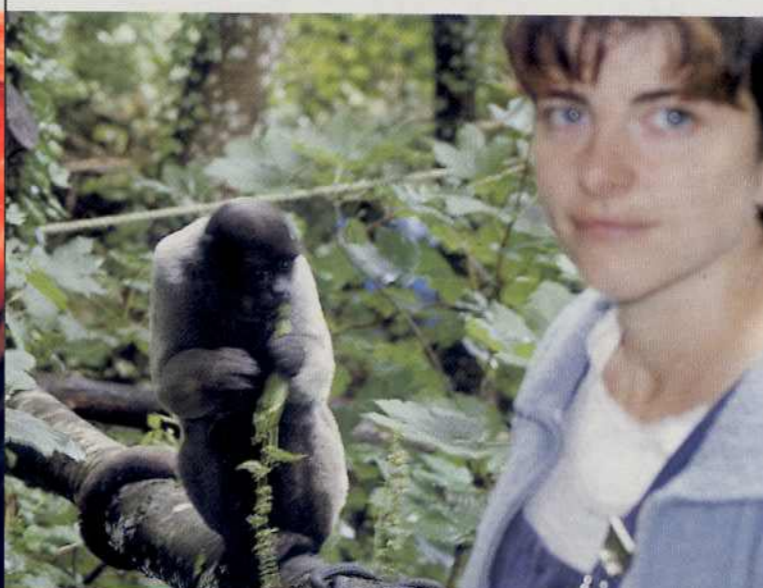


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animal crackers!

Fancy yourself as a real-life Dr Dolittle? Always wanted to walk and talk with the animals? Well, move over Eddie Murphy – 19 takes a look at some sought-after careers within the animal kingdom. . .



Emma Newman, 22

is a kennel maid at London's Battersea Dogs' Home

Why did you choose an animal career?

I've always adored animals and they seem to like me, so a career in this field seemed logical! I sent my CV to various animal centres – Battersea Dogs' Home gave me an interview and I got the job!

Describe a typical day

My hours are 8am-5pm Monday to Friday; 8am-4pm at weekends. I get one weekend off in four – this job requires dedication! I start by cleaning the kennels in my area, then I feed the dogs. If any are sick or injured, I take them to the nurse. I carry on cleaning kennels throughout the day, and spend as much time playing with the dogs as possible – we like to keep them entertained!

What are the best things about the job?

You get to know all the dogs and they learn to trust you. If any dogs aren't claimed, we send them to sales where they're put up for adoption – we sell around 30-35 dogs a week. I'm so pleased when a dog goes to a new home, it makes my job worthwhile.

And the worst?

If a dog is brought to us in a really terrible condition it may have to be put down, which is so upsetting. Another downside is being bitten – a golden retriever bit right through my foot once! You also need to have a strong stomach when cleaning out the kennels!

What qualifications do you need?

I didn't have any experience other than having been brought up with animals. Battersea Dogs' Home has its own training scheme. They teach you how to handle the dogs and judge their temperament, as well as general safety. Most of it's common sense, though you've got to really love animals to do this job, as some of the things you see can be emotionally distressing.

To buy a dog, report a lost dog, make a donation or learn about career opportunities, contact Battersea Dogs' Home, 4 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4AA (tel 0171 622 3626).

Wendy Harrison, 24

is a qualified veterinary surgeon practising in London and Sussex

Why did you choose an animal career?

I grew up on a farm, and when I was six the vet came to treat our pony. I remember watching her being anaesthetised and thinking how amazing it was. From then on, I knew I wanted to be a vet.

Describe a typical day

I'm in a practice that deals with all kinds of animals, so my work is varied. My hours are, too, but generally I start at 9am and attend a morning, lunch-time and evening surgery. I see animals that need x-rays, blood tests or special treatments in between. Evening surgery usually finishes around 7pm but I work through the night on a one-in-four rota, as well as one whole weekend in four.

What are the best things about the job?

I love my job! You feel like you're doing something worthwhile – especially when you deliver a litter of puppies or help an animal that's suffering. And it's always great to see a poorly animal get better through treatment that you've given it.

And the worst?

Having to put an animal to sleep. You think, 'Was there something else I could have done?', and I hate seeing the owners so upset. There's the yucky side, too – recently I saw a rabbit that was suffering from diarrhoea, yech! It's not all fluffy kittens. . .

What qualifications do you need?

You need GCSEs (grade C or above) in science subjects, maths and English. You also need A level chemistry, maths and physics. Veterinary colleges like three A grades before they'll accept you but, that said, I had to retake my A levels and some colleges will take you on despite this. It's a five-year course, so you need to be determined. On the practical side, the ability to deal with people is a must, and it helps if you don't need much sleep!

If you're interested in becoming a veterinary surgeon, write to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF (tel 0171 222 2001).

Esther Chamberlain, 24

works at The Monkey Sanctuary in Looe, Cornwall

Why did you choose an animal career?

I studied Human Sciences at university and developed an interest in primates. A friend's mum saw my job advertised in the local paper and thought it would be perfect for me.

Describe a typical day

When I got the job I was told I'd be sharing a house with the monkeys, and we really do! The Sanctuary cares for woolly monkeys 24 hours a day. I start at 7.30am to prepare their breakfast. During the summer, when we're open to the public, the monkeys roam free in the gardens and I supervise them and chat to visitors. I also take care of the sick monkeys and liaise with the local vet.

What are the best things about the job?

I love the fact that the monkeys have such individual personalities: Ivor is a young male who imitates everything that Max, an older monkey, does – just like humans! I don't have favourites. You get to know them all, and their language, and they in turn learn to trust you.

And the worst?

I don't like the fact that the monkeys are in captivity – we're hoping to set something up in Brazil where the monkeys can be introduced back to their natural environment. Also, you can't afford to be squeamish when you have to clean up monkey vomit, and worse!

What qualifications do you need?

You can find animal carers courses at various colleges, and any experience in fundraising is also useful and a big asset when you're looking for work in conservation. You also need to have empathy, patience and a calm and happy disposition, as the animals can be affected by your moods. It's not the job to do if you want to make lots of money (I get around £62 a week, plus free board and lodging), it's very much a labour of love.

To learn more about career and volunteer opportunities or make a donation, write with an sae to The Monkey Sanctuary, Looe, Cornwall PL13 1NZ, or call 01503 262 532 for visiting hours.

Barbara Kvalheim, 23

is an inspector with the RSPCA, based in Sussex

Why did you choose an animal career?

Ever since I can remember, I've wanted to work for the RSPCA as an inspector. However, I had to wait until I was 22, which is the minimum age at which you can become one.

Describe a typical day

Generally my day is from 9am to 6pm, Monday to Friday. On top of that, I'm on all-night emergency standby once a week and I work one weekend in six. In the morning we download the calls sent from the regional office and put them in priority order. We deal with everything from swans with hooks stuck in their beaks to injured horses. Also, we investigate allegations of cruelty or neglect.

What are the best things about the job?

Saving animals from cruelty. And the variety! The majority of the animals we attend to are wild, though sometimes we're called out to circuses to attend to sick tigers! I try not to become too attached to the animals. If I did, my house would resemble a zoo!

And the worst?

The cruelty. And some people get nasty because they view our work as interference. It's very important to educate people and help them to improve their animal's quality of life, but we're not here to prosecute anyone – we're here to help.

What qualifications do you need?

The RSPCA runs a training course. To get a place you need five GCSEs (grades C or above) including maths, English and a science. The course lasts around six months and you're taught animal welfare legislation, some veterinary skills, and even absailing and power-boating for rescue purposes! You have to sit several exams and must pass all of them. Once you've qualified, you're posted as an inspector – you could be based anywhere in England or Wales.

For more information on a career as an inspector, write to the RSPCA, Causeway, Horsham, West Sussex RH12 1HG, or call 0990 555 999.

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