From an Animal Clinic to the Zoo

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Care and Welfare

Do your students care for pets? Have they visited a veterinary for help? Perhaps they have visited a zoo or animal conservation park. The articles and activities in this resource guide and in the online lesson suggestions focus on the career possibilities related to animal care and welfare.

There is evidence of people keeping animals for centuries — not always for the love of the animals but for prestige.

“Wall carvings found in Egypt and Mesopotamia are evidence that rulers and aristocrats created menageries as early as 2500 BCE. They left records of expeditions to distant places to bring back exotic animals such as giraffes, elephants, bears, dolphins and birds,” according to the National Geographic.

The first modern zoo was built in Paris in 1793 and still exists as the Menagerie du Jardin des Plantes. The Philadelphia Zoo was the first true zoo in the United States. Although chartered in 1859, it did not open until after the Civil War on July 1, 1874. Zoos, like the Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute exemplify standards of welfare and preservation of species.

Read about the second woman to direct the Smithsonian zoological endeavors and the Black curator of large carnivores who organized a professional group for people of color who are zookeepers. Read the KidsPost article to learn what South African veterinarians do to care for wildlife. And after the record death of manatees in 2021 learn of a corporate partnership to attempt to feed those who come to the Cape Canaveral area to winter.

The power of photography to capture the bond between an orphaned mountain gorilla and her longtime caretaker in Virunga National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo is poignantly seen in “Photobombing gorilla Ndakasi dies in caretaker’s arms.” It is a relationship that went deeper than care and welfare.
KIDSPOST

Record manatee deaths cause Florida to try feeding program

More than 1,000 manatees died in Florida waters in 2021 as water pollution hurt their food supply.

BY ASSOCIATED PRESS

As winter begins in Florida, a new feeding plan could save many manatees from starvation. But they will still face the long-term threat of man-made water pollution stifling their food supply, wildlife officials said.

The slow-moving marine mammals will soon begin to gather at warm-water sites, such as power plants, as the ocean temperatures cool, and there may not be enough sea grass to sustain them, officials told the state Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The Florida Power and Light Company (FPL), the state’s largest electric utility, is contributing $700,000 for a “temporary field response station” to feed the manatees at its plant in Cape Canaveral on the east coast of the state. The money is also for rescue and rehabilitation of distressed manatees, the company said in a news release.

The program has not been tried before. “The eyes of the world are on this,” said wildlife commission Chairman Rodney Barreto. “We’ve got to get it right.”

Officials stress that people should not feed the marine mammals. They say it is illegal to do so, and it leads to an unhealthy association between the animals and food sources.

The new feeding program is intended as a temporary measure to prevent more manatee deaths while the state spends millions of dollars restoring the sea grass beds in areas such as the Indian River.

GREG LOVETT/AP

Manatees crowd together near the warm-water outflows from a power plant in Riviera Beach, Florida, in February. More than 1,000 of the animals died in 2021. Some died by being struck by boats, but others died of starvation. Business and government officials are collaborating on a program to feed the manatees this winter.
Lagoon, which is a critical winter habitat.

There are between 7,000 and 8,000 manatees — also known as sea cows — in Florida, according to state estimates. They are close relatives of elephants and can live up to 65 years, but they reproduce slowly. It’s illegal to harm them, because they are protected by the Endangered Species Act.

More than 1,000 manatees died in Florida waters last year, a record number in a single year. Some were killed by boat strikes and many more were scarred by those collisions. In addition, many starve to death because polluted water kills the sea grass upon which they depend.

The issue facing wildlife officials in the long-term is how to stop fertilizer-filled runoff from sugar farms and other agricultural operations, as well as storm-water and sewage flows from cities, into bays and estuaries, which can lead to the breeding of harmful organisms such as blue-green algae. Warmer water and air temperatures triggered by climate change make the problem worse, many experts say.

“We all know the underlying problem is water quality,” said Larry Williams, Florida state supervisor with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, adding that other marine creatures will soon suffer as well. “They are declining too, just like the manatees are.”

Florida wildlife commission member Mike Sole, who is an executive with FPL’s parent company, NextEra Energy, also said the manatee deaths are “really just a symptom” of the greater pollution problem. “We’ve got to also focus on the cure of water quality,” Sole said.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis recently announced $481 million in water quality improvement grants throughout the state. Of that, $53 million is being allocated for wastewater treatment in the Indian River Lagoon area.

Barreto, the Florida wildlife commission chairman, said there must be a sustained effort to restore the manatee-friendly sea grass beds and clean up the polluted water causing the problem.

“We want to make sure the herd survives,” Barreto said.

— January 2, 2022
Solutions to Causes of Manatee Deaths

A relative of the manatees that gather in winter near Cape Canaveral was hunted to extinction in the 1700s. The KidsPost article, “Record manatee deaths cause Florida to try feeding program” tells of today’s threats to manatees and possible solutions.

A close relative of elephants, manatees can grow to 10 feet long and weigh 800 to 1,200 pounds. These gentle mammals eat aquatic plants. A mother manatee nurses her calf for one to two years.

The Florida Manatee Sanctuary Act of 1978 as well as the Endangered Species Act protect them.

1. In the first two paragraphs, what is the message conveyed by the verbs “could save” and “may not be”?

2. What is the problem that different groups are trying to solve?

3. The headline and the first sentence, relate the short-term solution to the problem.
   a. How is the Florida Power and Light Company involved?
   b. What three areas will be addressed, according to the FPL press release?

4. What human behaviors are wildlife officials trying to stop?

5. Another solution is taking place simultaneously.
   a. What is this solution?
   b. Why in such areas as the Indian River Lagoon?

6. What percent of known sea cows in Florida waters died in 2021? How were they killed?

7. Name four long-term, man-made threats to manatees that must be stopped.
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   d. 

8. Why does the Florida state supervisor with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service believe these threats must be addressed?

9. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis announced a $481 million water quality improvement grant for use throughout the state.
   a. What percent of the recent Florida water quality improvement grant will be used in the Indian River Lagoon area?
   b. To address which problem?

10. If you were Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission chair Rodney Barreto which threat to manatees would you address first? Why?
An Integrated Curriculum of The Washington Post Newspaper In Education Program

LOCAL

National Zoo names veteran curator Brandie Smith its new director

At campus since 2008, she helped revitalize giant panda program

BY MICHAEL E. RUANE

• Originally Published November 10, 2021

Growing up in rural Pennsylvania, Brandie Smith planned to become a doctor. It was a proper career for a young person from a small town who was interested in science. And she was preparing for an internship with an ophthalmologist.

But she also felt the tug of a different calling. She had always loved animals. One day she cold-called the Pittsburgh Zoo and landed an internship there instead. Her mother tried to dissuade her. “If you don’t want to be a doctor, do something respectable with your life,” she recalled her mother saying. “Be a lawyer.”

On Tuesday, Smith, 53, of Potomac was named the new director of the Smithsonian’s National Zoo, becoming only the second woman to hold the prestigious job in the zoo’s 132-year history.

As such, she oversees the care of 2,700 animals, supervises 350 employees and handles the zoo’s $55 million budget, the Smithsonian said. The zoo is on a 163-acre campus in Northwest Washington. It also operates the 3,200-acre Conservation Biology Institute in Front Royal, Va.

The appointment takes effect immediately.

“I’m honored,” she said Monday. “I’m excited. This is an incredible place. … This isn’t just the National Zoo, it’s the Smithsonian’s National Zoo and Conservation Biology Institute. Wow.”

Smith had been acting director of the zoo since May, when previous director Steven Monfort departed. She has been at the zoo since 2008.

Among other things, she helped revitalize the giant panda program and was involved in the birth of three surviving cubs, Bao Bao in 2013, Bei Bei in 2015 and Xiao Qi Ji in 2020, the zoo said in a statement.

“We have seen Brandie’s expertise, talent and leadership in action for years, including during the past several months as acting director,” said Lonnie G. Bunch III, secretary of the Smithsonian. “I am elated to have Brandie at the helm.”

Smith grew up in Indiana, Pa., just east of Pittsburgh. Her father was a radio and TV journalist and a county commissioner, she said. She attended the local college, Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

“Coming from a small town, if you’re interested in science you should be a doctor,” she said. “But I couldn’t get over the fact that I just loved animals and conservation. … I grew up in the country. So the woods, that’s where I went. You didn’t go to a mall … you just went walking in the woods.”

“I had an internship scheduled with an ophthalmologist when I was in college because I thought this is what a responsible young woman interested in the sciences should do,” she said.

“It’s that small-town upbringing, where the idea of becoming a zoologist … is up there with becoming a cowboy or astronaut or a superstar,” she said Monday. “It was just something that you didn’t really think of as a career you could aspire to.”

She said she is familiar with the zoo’s
array of animals — from the naked mole rats to the Damaraland mole rats, “which are less naked and much bigger,” she said. From the eastern newt to the “gorgeous” emperor newt, to the fire bellied toad. “I love amphibians,” she said.

The zoo also has lions, tigers and elephants, as well as the Goliath bird eating tarantula, the African pancake tortoise and the tomato frog.

But the zoo faces financial challenges. It closed for 12 months because of the coronavirus pandemic and has lost the revenue generated by parking fees and vending operations in the park.

“That averages out to about a million dollars a month when we’re open,” she said. “The revenue is gone and we can’t recover it.”

Unlike other businesses, it could not simply idle operations, she said. Animals still needed care. “When you work at the zoo, you can’t shut down. You can’t slow down.”

The zoo also had to spend more for personal protective equipment during the pandemic for staff members and animals.

Despite those efforts, nine of its lions and tigers were infected with the delta variant of the virus, and one lion nearly had to be euthanized.

Smith said her priority as director will be ensuring that the zoo has a secure financial footing. “That is something that is going to be driving a lot of our decisions in the coming months,” she said.
Black zookeeper aims to shed unicorn status through outreach

- Originally Published October 19, 2021

Craig Saffoe was at the Fresno Chaffee Zoo’s bigcats exhibit when he saw the man.

“Out bounds this Black guy, in a zoo uniform,” Saffoe said. “He had this walk, like the coolest walk you’ve ever seen. And I think, ‘Ah, that’s cool, they let their volunteers come in,’ ”

Then he realized the man wasn’t a volunteer.

“He had his training buoy, his target stick, his meat pouch,” Saffoe said, and he realized: “Oh, my God, he’s the keeper.”

The man didn’t fit the profile of who most zookeepers in America are: White and female.

“I was mortified that I said that,” Saffoe said. Because, like the man in Fresno, Calif., he was watching during a conference in 2018, Saffoe, too, is a Black zookeeper.

Saffoe, 47, is the curator of large carnivores at the Smithsonian’s National Zoo in D.C. (who just had a rough month helping nurse the zoo’s biggest cats back to health after they caught covid-19, probably from an asymptomatic but contagious human).

And for decades, he has often been one of the few — if not the only — zookeeper of color in the room (er, cage).

Even as his responsibility and prestige in the field grew, his Black friends would dismiss his work as “White people stuff” — and indeed, the field is about 74 percent White.

When he was at work at the National Zoo, where he’s been for more than 25 years, people who didn’t know him often assumed — as Saffoe did with the Black zookeeper in Fresno — that he’s a volunteer, or even a janitor.

The same thing happened to Jordan Veasley, an animal keeper at Cougar Mountain Zoo in Washington state, who said he gets asked “if I’m a janitor or if I clean the bathrooms” when he’s walking around the zoo.

Veasley, 32, whose social media posts as Jungle Jordan are wildly popular, finally tackled his unicorn status in an emotional viral video where he starts by saying, “I. Am. A Black zookeeper … there’s two words there — Black and
Zookeeper. Both probably words you’ve never heard combined together.”

Zookeeping has been an uncommon profession in the Black community. Saffoe said that as a little boy growing up in North Carolina, he confounded his parents when all he wanted to do was read about animals, talk about animals and work with animals.

A veterinarian took him under his wing to come watch a surgery, which led to him enrolling in veterinary school. But it soon became clear that animal behavior — not animal medicine — was his true love.

He applied for an internship at the National Zoo and received a call from John Seidensticker, who was the big-cat specialist at the zoo and one of the authors of “Great Cats,” a book Saffoe had read so many times he knew it word for word. Saffoe came to D.C. and has been here since, living out his boyhood dream.

There were some rough patches, such as when Ollie the bobcat escaped, or these past few weeks, when he had to prepare his staff for the idea that one of the beloved lions was near death. And though he was always aware of his minority status, he didn’t dwell on it.

“I have never experienced, myself, direct, overt racism,” Saffoe told me, as we walked among the exhibits one day last month.

“I had a lot of White people helping me, pushing me along,” he said.

But when he talked to that Fresno zookeeper, he realized all the times he felt alone, when he was not taken seriously and mistaken for a janitor. And he knew there were Black kids like him out there, wondering if they had a place in the world of zookeeping.

“It was one of the best conversations I’ve had in my career,” he said.

And they realized there had to be others like them. “I told him, ‘You’re a Black guy in Fresno. I’m a Black guy in D.C. Wouldn’t it be groovy if we had a group for people like us?’”

That was the beginning of the Association of Minority Zoo and Aquarium Professionals, or AMZAP.

This idea started forming around the time that zoos closed down for the pandemic, and without visitors and classes, Saffoe had time to start building his group and expand it to include all people of color in the field.

While many of the zookeepers in AMZAP bond over the way they’ve been misunderstood within their profession and their culture, one zookeeper joined the group to make sure the importance of animals in her culture is secured.

Carolyn Hornberger, 31, is part Native American, with a heritage linked to the Oneida tribe. And while she works with the great apes at the National Zoo in D.C., she was frustrated that the importance of animal stories in Native American culture weren’t represented in the Smithsonian’s National Museum of the American Indian. So now she’s working on exhibits about the role of animals in some tribes’ legends, lore and tradition to include in the museum.

Saffoe’s group of more than 300 members is growing, with a Hmong American aquarist from California, a British Indian veterinarian from Ohio and a Mexican American aviary keeper from Disney’s Animal Kingdom in Florida recently joining. Outreach and education are his primary goals.

“I would love for my Black community to see me in this role,” he said. “I would love to go to a school that has a population of Black students, find the Black nerd who loves animals and tell him, ‘I love animals, like you. And there’s a place for you.’”

Craig Saffoe is the curator of large carnivores at the Smithsonian’s National Zoo.

Bill O’Leary/The Washington Post
KIDSPOST

South African clinic embraces the wild side of veterinary care

A gorillas, tiger and huge snake are a few of recent patients at state-of-the-art clinic.

BY HEATHER DJUNGA

A tiger with a tummy ache, an anaconda refusing to eat, a gorilla with a stuffy nose — these aren’t animals you would find when you take your dog to the veterinarian. But at one clinic in South Africa, the patients are often wild.

“We house all animals, from a tiny black-footed cat to a tall giraffe,” said Jacques O’Dell of Onderstepoort Wildlife Sanctuary Clinic. “We would, however, not be able to house a large African elephant. However, an elephant calf would be possible.”

Onderstepoort is part of the Veterinary Academic Hospital of the University of Pretoria. Its facilities were recently upgraded to include state-of-the-art housing for large animals. Such facilities...
have made it possible for patients such as Makokou, a gorilla from the Johannesburg Zoo with sinus problems, to spend a few nights under supervised care.

“We take great interest in all of our patients, but certainly the rare and endangered species are a favorite,” said O’Dell, who is head of the wildlife clinical section. “Some recent interesting patients have included a honey badger, ground hornbills and a litter of baby cheetahs.”

Another interesting visitor was the South American green anaconda that was more than 16 feet long. “She needed antibiotics for a bacterial infection, which caused her to lose weight.” As the snake returned to good health, the clinic staff was especially careful because a muscular anaconda could easily crush a human.

There was also a white tiger, admitted after a large piece of bone pierced its colon, or large intestine. The tiger, as with other big, fierce animals, needed to be shot with a dart containing drugs to calm it before the staff could safely treat it.

Handling wild animal patients doesn’t always go smoothly. O’Dell said he was recently chased in an enclosure by an angry honey badger and had to cling to the side of the railing.

Before the facility, wildlife was mostly treated on-site, at zoos, farms or reserves. “We still treat animals in their familiar environments, but sometimes the animals need special care in the wildlife hospital,” he said.

And that care has continued despite the coronavirus pandemic.

“She still needs to drink their milk, eat their veggies and take their vitamins — wild animals need to get the correct food, and without this, can suffer from a range of nutritional problems, especially those in captivity,” O’Dell said. “They might even need to visit us to get their multivitamins.”

— July 13, 2021
A Career in the Zoo, Veterinary Clinic or Animal Reserve?

You love animals. You enjoy reading about them. You have been able to care for one or more pets. Perhaps, you have a future in animal care. Read The Washington Post articles and do some research to learn more about some of the many possible career paths.

1. Read “Veteran National Zoo curator Smith lands top job.”
   Brandie Smith is the second woman in the zoo’s 132-year history to be its director.
   a. What does the director position at the Smithsonian involve?
   b. In what way did Smith’s childhood prepare her to work at the zoo?
   c. Smith has worked at the zoo since 2008. What do we know about her experience through press releases and through interviews?
   d. How will the pandemic influence her new role as director?

2. Read the KidsPost article “African clinic goes wild with veterinary care.”
   Heather Djunga introduces readers to the Onderstepoort Wildlife Sanctuary Clinic and its staff.
   a. What do you learn about the animal patients that are at the clinic?
   b. What similarities are there of domestic animals to wildlife?
   c. Why is an understanding of nutrition important to a veterinarian?

3. Read “Black zookeeper aims to shed unicorn status through outreach.”
   Being a zookeeper has not been seen as a career opportunity for people of color.
   a. Who helped Craig Saffoe to become a veterinarian?
   b. What is the importance of internships to finding a career?
   c. What position does Saffoe hold at the Smithsonian's National Zoo?
   d. For whom was the Association of Minority Zoo and Aquarium Professionals founded?

4. After reading articles about people whose careers center on caring for animals of all sizes, what do you understand about these employment fields and the roles each plays? This list is a beginning of the many possibilities. Read more about an area and write a short piece to share with your classmates.

Aquatic animal medicine  Public Policy
Dermatology                Shelter medicine
Epidemiological research   Teaching
Equine Veterinarian        Veterinarian
Food supply medicine       Veterinary surgeon
Global veterinary medicine  Wildlife animal medicine
Marine biology             Zoo curator
Ophthalmology              Zoo director
Orthopedics                Zookeeper
Pet pharmacist             Zoonotic disease specialist
5. Do some research. Are there veterinary schools near you? Name them. In what areas do they specialize?

6. The U.S. Army Corps and U.S. Air Force offer career paths in veterinary areas. Research what these would include.

7. In addition to providing care for companion animals, veterinarians care for the health and welfare of farm animals, exotic animals and working animals (such as those in the equine industry). The largest employer of veterinarians in the U.S. outside these areas is the U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Safety and Inspection Service. What jobs do trained veterinarians do at the USDA and in other government employment?

8. Not everyone has a positive attitude toward zoological parks or certain areas of corporate veterinary medicine. What concerns do these people have?

9-10. Write a short essay about your experience caring for pets, being in a veterinary office with your pet, encountering animals in the wild, thinking about a career in which animals are involved or another topic that is related to animals.
Ndakasi, beloved mountain gorilla whose photobomb led to global fame, dies in caretaker’s arms

The 14-year-old had risen to fame appearing in a park ranger’s selfie

by Timothy Bella

Ndakasi, a mountain gorilla in the Democratic Republic of Congo who found global fame and admiration after she photobombed a park ranger’s selfie in 2019, has died at the age of 14.

The Virunga National Park said in a statement Tuesday that Ndakasi died on Sept. 26 after battling a prolonged illness and “took her final breath in the loving arms of her caretaker and lifelong friend, Andre Bauma.” The statement is accompanied by a photo of Bauma, who befriended the gorilla when she was just 2 months old, holding Ndakasi shortly before her death at the park’s Senkwekwe Center, where she had lived for about 12 years.

“It is with heartfelt sadness that Virunga announces the death of beloved orphaned mountain gorilla, Ndakasi,” the park tweeted, adding that her condition...
Ndakasi and another orphaned mountain gorilla, Ndeze, photobomb Matthieu's selfie.

“rapidly deteriorated.” The park did not specify her illness.

Bauma, who was not made available for an interview, said in a statement that it was “a privilege to support and care for such a loving creature.”

“It was Ndakasi’s sweet nature and intelligence that helped me to understand the connection between humans and Great Apes and why we should do everything in our power to protect them,” he said. “I am proud to have called Ndakasi my friend.”

Ndakasi went viral in 2019 after she and another orphaned mountain gorilla, Ndeze, struck a pose just as park ranger Mathieu Shamavu took a selfie. The image, which features the gorillas playfully peering toward the camera in hilarious fashion as Shamavu takes a serious selfie, brought instant joy to the Internet and had people wondering if the image was too good to be true.

“YES, it’s real!” the park wrote in a caption when the image was posted to Instagram on April 22, 2019.

But Ndakasi had already lived an interesting life before the photobomb.

Born in 2007 at the park that sits between Uganda and Rwanda, Ndakasi’s life began at a time when mountain gorillas were critically endangered. There were only 720 mountain gorillas on the planet in 2007, according to the park — a number that has since swelled to more than 1,000.

Her life started with tragedy. In April 2007, rangers at the Congolese park found a 2-month-old Ndakasi “clinging to the lifeless body of her mother, gunned down by armed militia hours earlier,” park officials said in a statement. Her mother’s death was part of a series of massacres of gorilla families in the region that led the park to strengthen the protection of its mountain gorillas, they added.

Understanding how dangerous it would be to leave the mountain gorilla by herself, vulnerable to people with guns and human encroachment, rangers brought Ndakasi to the park’s rescue center. It’s there that she met Bauma.

“All night long, Andre held the baby close to him,” the park said in a statement.

Two years later, the park developed the Senkwekwe Center, the only facility in the world that looks after orphaned mountain gorillas, and Bauma became its manager.

It didn’t take long for Ndakasi and Bauma’s bond to grow. By the time Ndakasi was featured in the 2014 documentary “Virunga,” with Leonardo DiCaprio as an executive producer, Bauma told the BBC that he was more than a caretaker and friend to her.

“We shared the same bed, I played with her, I fed her,” he said. “I can say I am her mother.”

Then, Ndakasi showed her personality in an image that received about 97,000 likes and worldwide adulation for what people thought were surprising poses.

“Those gorilla gals are always acting cheeky so this was the perfect shot of their true personalities!” the park wrote at the time. “It’s no surprise to see these girls on their two feet either — most primates are comfortable walking upright (bipedalism) for short bursts of time.”

Shamavu was not surprised by the photobomb from Ndakasi and Ndeze, posting a caption that read, “Another day at the office …”

Bauma, who is pictured wearing a mask and looking devastated as his friend dies in his arms, said that while she would be missed by everyone at Virunga, “we are forever grateful for the richness Ndakasi brought to our lives during her time at Senkwekwe.”

“I loved her like a child, and her cheerful personality brought a smile to my face every time I interacted with her,” he said.

Timothy Bella is a staff writer and editor for the General Assignment team, focusing on national news. His work has appeared in outlets such as Esquire, the Atlantic, New York magazine and the Undefeated.