

Zookeeper

Zookeepers look after animals in zoos, wildlife parks and safari parks. They care for a diverse range of animals from large and dangerous to rare and exotic.

The Work

You could be:

- cleaning enclosures and changing bedding
- preparing food and feeding the animals
- making sure animal enclosures are as close to natural conditions as possible
- checking animals for illness or injury and helping to treat them when they are not well
- carrying out basic maintenance on animal enclosures to ensure the safety of animals and visitors
- patrolling the park, making sure visitors are safe and the animals are not disturbed
- helping to breed animals
- responsible for a particular section of the zoo or park or for certain types of animals, such as primates or reptiles
- answering questions from visitors and giving talks to schoolchildren and others.

Pay

The figures below are only a guide. Actual pay rates may vary, depending on:

- where you work
- the size of company or organisation you work for
- the demand for the job.

Salaries for trainee zookeepers at entry level are around £13,000 to £16,000 a year. Qualified keepers can earn around £16,000 to £20,000 a year, while senior keepers earn up to around £22,000 a year. Head keepers can earn up to £32,000 a year.

Conditions

- You would work both indoors, sometimes in tropically heated enclosures, and outdoors, in all weather.
- The work is physically hard – there is a lot of bending, stretching, lifting and carrying.
- It can be dirty, smelly and noisy.
- Some animals can be dangerous and there can be the risk of attack, although you would rarely come into direct contact with large exotic breeds, such as lions and rhinos.
- You may have to work shifts, with early starts and late finishes, especially in summer when zoos and wildlife parks are open for longer.
- Weekend work is normally necessary.
- You may need to wear protective clothing, and a uniform may also be provided.

Getting In

- There is a lot of competition for vacancies.
- Previous experience of work with animals – voluntary work or a holiday job in a zoo, kennel, farm or stable – is important if not essential.
- A good standard of general education is useful. Some employers may prefer you to have some subjects at National 4 or 5, especially English, Maths and science subjects.
- You can take a full time college course before starting work. There are courses in animal care available at NC (SCQF Levels 4-6), HNC (SCQF Level 7) and HND (SCQF Level 8) levels.
- Entry requirements for an NC vary from no formal requirements up to 4 subjects at National 4 or 5. The HNC and HND require 1-2 Highers or an NC in animal care.
- You may need a full, clean driving licence, particularly for a wildlife or safari park.
- You need to be fit enough to do an active job.

What Does It Take

You need to be:

- dedicated
- passionate about animal welfare and conservation
- confident about dealing with both large and small animals
- reliable and responsible
- safety conscious
- observant
- able to communicate with visitors, both children and adults, and to answer questions
- physically fit
- able to deal with unpleasant conditions and not be squeamish.

Training

- You would normally train on the job alongside an experienced keeper.
- This may be combined with part time attendance at college for a relevant SVQ, NC or HNC.
- You could do a Foundation Degree in Zoo Management at Reaseheath College in Nantwich, Cheshire.
- You could do the 2 year distance learning [Diploma in Management of Zoo and Aquarium Animals \(DMZAA\)](#), offered by Sparsholt College (Hampshire) and the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA). You need to be working in a zoo or aquarium due to the practical elements of the course.

Getting On

- In larger zoos and parks, there can be promotion opportunities to posts such as senior keeper or head keeper.
- You could become specialised in looking after one kind of animal.
- It can help if you are able to move around the country for job opportunities.

Contacts

Association of British and Irish Wild Animal Keepers (ABWAK)

Email: info@abwak.org

Website: www.abwak.org

Twitter: @ABWAK

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British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA)

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Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS)

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Twitter: @rzss

Facebook: www.facebook.com/RZSSofficial

Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

Tel: 0344 225 1826

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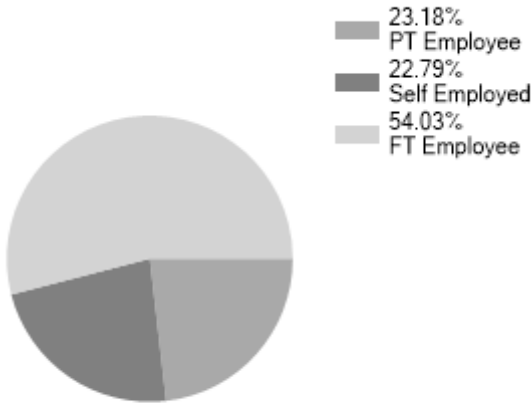
Website: www.zsl.org

Twitter: @OfficialZSL

Facebook: www.facebook.com/officialzsl

Statistics

Employment Status UK %

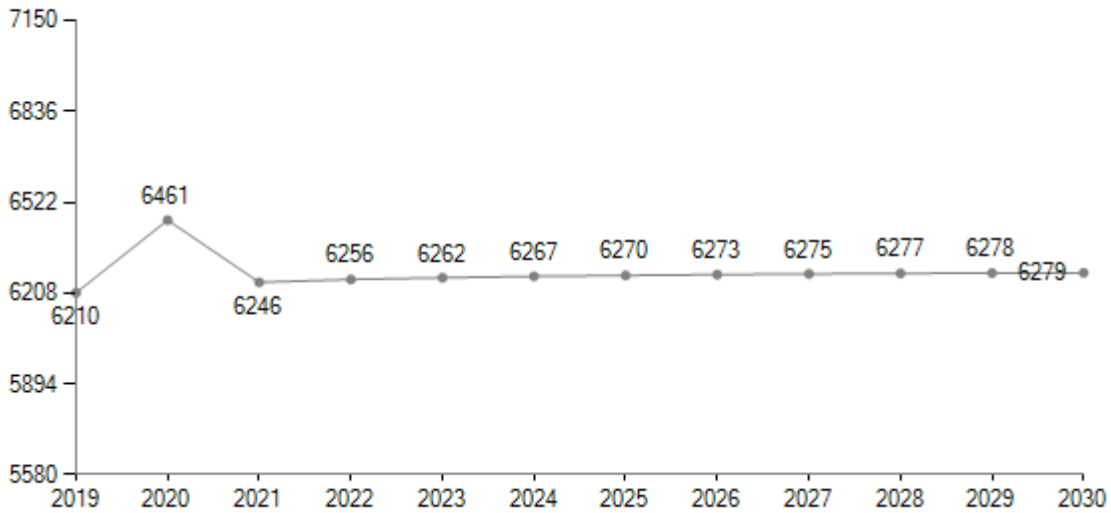


Past Unemployment - Scotland

No statistics available for Scotland.

LMI data powered by [LMI for All](#)

Predicted Employment in Scotland



LMI data powered by [EMSI UK](#)