

# Career Routes

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## Working with Animals

HC1(3)

Working with animals appeals to many people. This leaflet gives you the basic facts about various jobs involving animals, and lists a range of leaflets in this series that give more detailed information. As in most areas of work, the higher the qualifications you gain, the more responsible the jobs open to you.

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- If you love animals, it can be very satisfying to work with them.
- In many of the jobs, you're doing something really worthwhile.
- It's no good being too sentimental if you work in areas like farming, veterinary work or animal research.
- Some jobs are very routine.
- The work can be dirty, smelly and physically demanding.
- Many jobs with animals are not very well paid and opportunities for career progression may be limited.
- There's a lot of competition for jobs - some never get advertised.
- Working with animals can mean irregular hours, as they need 24-hour care.
- It's important to be aware of health and safety issues.
- For many of the jobs you need to be good at dealing with people as well as with animals.

### Vets

Vets - or veterinary surgeons - do perhaps the best-known and most popular job with animals. It's also the hardest job to train for, and entry is very competitive. You normally need good grades at A level, or equivalent qualifications. Veterinary schools also look for people with some practical experience. The high academic standard required is not surprising when you think that a vet has to know about health and disease in many different kinds of species. Vets have to be surgeons, dentists and anaesthetists as well as 'GPs'. They also act as pharmacists and must know about veterinary medicines.

### Veterinary nurses

Veterinary nurses work with vets in the same way that nurses work with doctors, in private veterinary practices, animal hospitals and clinics. To start recognised training you need five GCSEs at grades A\*-C, including English, maths and science, or an alternative approved qualification. If you don't have the entry requirements, you can train to be an animal nursing assistant. Animal nursing can be very satisfying, but can involve unsocial hours; you can't work your way up to becoming a vet, unless you go through veterinary training in the normal way.



## **Animal technicians**

Technicians work in colleges or universities, caring for animals that are used for teaching. They also look after animals that are used for experimental purposes in research establishments. Technicians may also help carry out experiments. Staff need an unsentimental attitude to the animals, but they must have a strong concern for their welfare.

There are no set entry requirements to get started, but most employers ask for at least four GCSEs at grades A\*-C or equivalent. English, maths and science subjects are particularly helpful. Higher-level qualifications can be an advantage in getting a job. Qualifications in animal care or veterinary nursing would also be useful for some jobs. Specialist qualifications can be gained in the workplace or through part-time study while working.

## **Animal charities and welfare societies**

The larger animal charities, such as the RSPCA and the PDSA, offer paid employment opportunities. Such organisations have work for vets, veterinary nurses, animal care assistants, inspectors, kennel assistants, administrative staff etc. Organisations, such as the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, and others, promote animal welfare.

Work with the welfare societies can be very satisfying. Some organisations offer training and career progression. If you can't find a paid job, you could consider volunteering.

## **Working in zoos, wildlife parks etc**

Keepers are the staff who have day-to-day responsibility for looking after the animals - feeding, cleaning out etc. Keepers need a reasonable standard of education: good GCSEs are helpful and higher qualifications may be an advantage. Entry is competitive, and employers often prefer applicants with relevant work experience. There are qualifications that keepers can study for on a part-time basis.

Other staff employed in the larger zoos, wildlife parks etc include education officers, vets, veterinary nurses and laboratory technicians, as well as administrative and catering staff, and so on.

## **Working in pet shops**

There are some large specialist pet retail chains, but pet shops are often small businesses, so do not often advertise for staff. As with any retail work, you need good communication and numeracy skills; an interest in biology is useful. A typical pet shop sells all kinds of small animals, fish and birds, as well as pet accessories, such as food, toys, baskets, tanks and cages. As well as dealing with customers, shop assistants usually care for the animals - feeding them, cleaning out their cages, watching for signs of disease, etc. Staff can take a course leading to the NPTC Advanced Certificate in Pet Store Management, available through further education colleges on a part-time basis or through the Pet Care Trust by distance learning. The Pet Care Trust also offers a Pet Foundation Course for retail sales assistants through a flexible learning package.

## **Conservation work**

Many jobs in nature conservation are only indirectly concerned with animals, as the focus is on conserving the environment for wildlife, rather than the wildlife itself. However, some

research programmes are concerned with re-introducing threatened species back into the environment from where they had disappeared.

## **Working in the media**

Careers like journalism, illustration and photography also offer opportunities for specialising in animals or natural history. There are two main routes into these areas.

- Take a vocational course in art, photography, video and sound recording, film production, journalism, or even diving. After having gained the right technical skills, you may be able to take advantage of opportunities for involvement with animals as they arise.
- Other people get to work in the media from the opposite direction. If your first expertise lies in your knowledge of animals, then it is the filming, writing techniques etc that you pick up as you go along.

So, these media jobs tend to be 'second career' activities, in the sense that you have to start somewhere else first. There can be all sorts of opportunities - editing, writing and taking photographs for leisure interest publications, illustrating books and so on.

## **Working with birds**

There are a few opportunities in general zoos and specialist bird collections. Bodies, such as the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust and the RSPB, employ paid staff to work as wardens etc in their reserves. There are also a few opportunities for well-qualified graduates to undertake research with organisations such as the British Trust for Ornithology. There are also many openings for volunteer ornithologists. On the bird-rearing side, you could consider gamekeeping (see below).

## **Working with cats**

There are very few opportunities for full-time work with cats. There are some positions in catteries which board cats whilst owners are on holiday, and setting up a cattery is a possibility if you wish to run your own business. Some quarantine kennels offer facilities for cats. Breeding cats rarely provides a means of making a living - most breeders do it as a sideline or a hobby. There are some opportunities working with the Cats Protection charity, at their adoption centres. Other animal welfare societies, and veterinary practices, offer the chance to work with cats among other animals.

## **Working with dogs**

There is a range of work with dogs, including working at boarding, breeding and quarantine kennels, in dog grooming and dog training. Opportunities exist with the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, Hearing Dogs for Deaf People, Canine Partners and Dogs for the Disabled. In the Armed Forces, police, and security guard work you can be trained as a dog-handler. Other opportunities include working as a dog warden, with a local authority.

## **Working with fish**

Some people work in zoos and aquariums, or in pet shops and other retail stores specialising in aquarium supplies. Fish farming, research in marine and freshwater biology and water keeping are other possibilities.

## **Working with horses**

Riding is a popular leisure activity, and the horseracing world creates many jobs. Jobs include riding instructor, groom, stable-hand, stable manager, jockey, trainer and farrier. There are also opportunities in horsebreeding studs. For entry to most of these jobs, dedication is more important than academic qualifications and training is on the job.

## **Working in agriculture**

Agriculture offers jobs for general farm-hands, skilled workers to look after livestock, and for managers to run large production units. There are college courses and qualifications that you can gain whilst in employment. Vets, people offering services (such as artificial inseminating, shearing or dehorning), animal health officers, livestock market employees etc, also come into contact with livestock.

## **Gamekeeping**

Gamekeepers breed and rear birds and animals for hunting and game purposes. Gamekeepers also organise the shoot days. Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships provide a training route, or there are a few full-time specialist college courses in gamekeeping, that offer a starting point.

## **Pet behaviour counsellors**

Pets with behavioural problems - cats with phobias or aggressive dogs, for example - can be referred by vets to pet behaviour counsellors, or owners can refer their own pets. There are a limited number of career opportunities with organisations such as animal welfare charities; most pet behaviour counsellors are self-employed.

A pet behaviour counsellor needs to know about the theory of behaviour, have animal-handling skills and the ability to communicate with and motivate pet owners. There is no set training route; a degree in behavioural science, veterinary medicine, psychology or a biological science can provide a relevant background for entry. There are an increasing number of higher education courses in animal behaviour. The website of the Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors (see end of leaflet) lists relevant courses.

## **Working at airports etc**

Some airports employ animal welfare officers at animal reception centres, to check the health and welfare of animals in transit. It's a very competitive job area and vacancies are rare. However, if you would like more information, you could contact the Animal Reception Centre at Heathrow Airport. Dog handlers, employed by HM Revenue & Customs or the UK Border Agency also work at airports and ports.

## **Other opportunities**

There are some opportunities for people already qualified and experienced in certain healthcare fields, such as physiotherapy and chiropractic, to undertake further training to work with animals.

## Getting started

Entry requirements and training routes vary with the job; some have been outlined already in this leaflet. More detailed information can be found in leaflets in this series about particular careers. Apprenticeships and Advanced Apprenticeships offer training routes into a variety of jobs. The Diploma in environmental and land-based studies, available in some schools and colleges in England from September 2009, would provide a relevant general background. Suitable college courses include those leading to BTEC First qualifications in animal care and in horse care, and BTEC National qualifications in animal management and in horse management, for example, as well as courses leading to NPTC and other qualifications. Look at local prospectuses, and use course databases, which may be available at local Connexions/careers centres.

In many jobs, NVQs can be gained through assessment in the workplace, usually with some time spent at college or with a training provider. Although there are many different types of work with animals, there is often a lot of competition for vacancies. So, gaining qualifications and experience is important.

## Pay and prospects

With training and experience, farmworkers may be able to progress to unit manager or supervisor posts. Technicians, zoo keepers and veterinary nurses may also work their way up to senior or supervisory positions. In some jobs, with experience, it may be possible to move into instructing and lecturing on animal-related college courses.

Jobs with animals that do not require many qualifications for entry (eg stable-hands, kennel workers and farm-hands) generally pay around the national minimum wage, perhaps with extra for weekend work and overtime. On the other hand, veterinary nurses earn around £17,000 and senior animal technicians are paid £20-30,000. A vet with his or her own practice can earn £70,000 or more!

**Adults:** Practical experience, perhaps through voluntary work, can give job applicants a strong advantage.



## Further information....

Lantra  
Lantra House  
Stoneleigh Park  
Coventry  
Warwickshire  
CV8 2LG  
Helpline: 0845 707 8007  
W: [www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)  
[www.ajobin.com](http://www.ajobin.com)

The Sector Skills Council covering land-based industries, including work with animals.  
Contact for information about careers, Apprenticeships etc.

The College of Animal Welfare  
6 Eaton Court Road  
Colmworth Business Park  
Eaton Socon  
St Neots  
Cambridgeshire  
PE19 8ER

T: 0844 372 9410

W: [www.caw.ac.uk](http://www.caw.ac.uk)

Offers a range of animal care courses - also at sites in Leeds, Potters Bar and Edinburgh.

Animal Care College

Index House

Ascot

Berkshire

SL5 7ET

T: 01344 636436

W: [www.animalcarecollege.co.uk](http://www.animalcarecollege.co.uk)

Offers distance-learning courses.

Pet Care Trust

Bedford Business Centre

170 Mile Road

Bedford

MK42 9TW

T: 01234 273933

W: [www.petcare.org.uk](http://www.petcare.org.uk)

See website for information on qualifications in pet store work and dog grooming.

Feline Advisory Bureau

Taeselbury, High Street

Tisbury

Wiltshire

SP3 6LD

T: 0870 742 2278

W: [www.fabcats.org](http://www.fabcats.org)

Information about catteries is on the website.

Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

The Old School

Brewhouse Hill

Wheathampstead

Hertfordshire

AL4 8AN

T: 01582 831818

W: [www.ufaw.org.uk](http://www.ufaw.org.uk)

Association of Pet Behaviour Counsellors  
PO Box 46  
Worcester  
WR8 9YS  
T: 01386 751151  
W: [www.apbc.org.uk](http://www.apbc.org.uk)  
Careers information is available on the website

For links to land-based colleges offering courses related to animals, click on 'About the LBCNC' and then 'Current membership' on: [www.lbcnc.org.uk](http://www.lbcnc.org.uk)

For information about learning opportunities in veterinary and allied professions, see: [www.vetnetln.ac.uk](http://www.vetnetln.ac.uk)

*Working with Animals & Wildlife* - from the *Real Life Guides* series - published by Trotman, price £9.99.

*So You Want to Work With Animals?* - published by Wayland, £8.99.

### **Other leaflets in this series which may interest you:**

HA 1(1) Agriculture  
HA 2(1) Fish farming, water keeping and ornamental fish  
HB 2(1) Nature conservation  
HC 1(4) Working with dogs  
HC 1(5) Working with horses  
HC 1(7) Working with birds  
HC 1(9) Gamekeeping  
HC 2(5) Animal welfare societies  
HC 2(2) Veterinary nurse  
HC 2(1) Veterinary surgeon  
HC 1(8) Zoos and wildlife parks  
TD (19) Animal technician  
TD (4) Marine and freshwater biology  
TD (6) Zoology/animal science

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## **Local notes**

**See leaflet HC1(6)** Pet groomer for local training opportunities.

## **Voluntary work/work experience**

- ➔ [www.vinspired.com](http://www.vinspired.com) the main volunteering site for 16-25 year olds (formerly Millennium Volunteers).
- ➔ Local RSPCA Animal Centres:  
Halifax: T: 01422 365628  
W: [www.rspca-halifax.org.uk](http://www.rspca-halifax.org.uk)  
See the website for volunteering opportunities

Bradford T: 01274 723063

W: [www.rspca-bradford.org.uk](http://www.rspca-bradford.org.uk)

See the website for volunteering information, under 'Help the RSPCA'

➔ Conservation and wildlife issues:

The RSPB

Northern Office (Denby Dale)

T: 01484 861148

W: [www.rspb.org.uk/local-groups](http://www.rspb.org.uk/local-groups)

Volunteering opportunities and information on local groups eg Huddersfield & Halifax group is on the website.

➔ Yorkshire Wildlife Trust:

T: 01904 659570

E: [info@ywt.org.uk](mailto:info@ywt.org.uk)

W: [www.yorkshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk](http://www.yorkshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk)

➔ Lancashire, Manchester & North Merseyside Wildlife Trust:

T: 01772 324129

E: [info@lancswt.org.uk](mailto:info@lancswt.org.uk)

W: [www.lancswt.org.uk](http://www.lancswt.org.uk)

## Apprenticeships

Work with horses may involve living away from home.

Northern Racing College, Doncaster

T: 01302 861000

W: [www.northernracingcollege.co.uk](http://www.northernracingcollege.co.uk)

Stubbing Court Training

T: 01246 566193

W: [www.stubbingcourtraining.com](http://www.stubbingcourtraining.com)

Askham Bryan College, York

T: 01904 772277

W: [www.askham-bryan.ac.uk](http://www.askham-bryan.ac.uk)

## Opportunities in the armed services as a guard dog trainer or search dog handler

For information contact:

Army Careers Information Office

26 Kirkgate

Huddersfield

HD1 1QQ

T: 01484 424868

Army Careers Information Office

33 Northgate

Halifax

HX1 1UR

T: 01422 362860

Army Careers Information Office

3 Lord Street

Oldham

T: 0161 627 3233

(Todmorden area)

Armed Forces Careers

10-14 Bond Court

Leeds

LS1 2JY

T: 0113 243 2914 or 0845 605 5555

Army Careers Information Office  
82 Northgate  
Wakefield  
WF1 3AY  
T: 01924 376232

Army Careers Information Office  
33 Westgate  
Bradford  
BD1 2QT  
T: 01274 726661

Armed Forces Careers  
Petersfield House  
29-31 Peter Street  
Manchester  
M2 4QJ  
T: 0161 8352916 or 0845 605 5555



Useful websites:

[www.armyjobs.mod.uk](http://www.armyjobs.mod.uk)  
[www.raf.mod.uk](http://www.raf.mod.uk)

[www.royalnavy.mod.uk](http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk)

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For further information and advice:

- contact the  0800 5 979 979 (free to UK landlines)  
Text: 07786 202 804 (start message with learn)  
E: [learningline@ckcareers.org.uk](mailto:learningline@ckcareers.org.uk)
- look at  [www.workabout.org.uk](http://www.workabout.org.uk)
- or visit one of our **Centres** - details from the Learningline and on Workabout

### **Equal Opportunities**

We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity for all. If you feel you have been discriminated against because of race, gender, disability, religion, age, ethnic origin or sexual orientation please speak to your Connexions Personal Adviser.