Animal Keeper
Job Classification: Non-Exempt
Reports To: Lead Keeper / Animal Curator

Park Overview
Wildlife Prairie Park has often been referred to as a jewel in the Midwest. Located just outside of Peoria, Illinois, this 2,000-acre zoological park is home to over 180 animals representing more than 60 species native to Illinois. Our guests come to learn about wolves, bison, waterfowl, black bears, elk, cougar, otters, and much more.
Since opening in 1978, Wildlife Prairie Park has remained dedicated to its mission of conservation, education, and recreation.
Wildlife Prairie Park continues to grow as a premier destination for wildlife education, conservation, outdoor recreation, and immersive guest experiences. The Park strives to connect people with nature while supporting conservation initiatives and community engagement.

Position Summary
The Animal Keeper plays an essential role in creating meaningful connections between visitors and wildlife while ensuring the highest standard of care for the Park's diverse animal residents. In this hands-on role, the Animal Keeper contributes to animal health, enrichment, training, and guest engagement while helping inspire public appreciation for wildlife through interpretive programs and educational outreach.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities
- Collect specific food items and create diets for animals.
- Develop and implement species-appropriate enrichment programs to promote the psychological and physical well-being of animals in alignment with established welfare standards and institutional guidelines; regularly evaluate and document enrichment effectiveness.
- Assist in the care, handling, and training of raptors, reptiles, amphibians, small mammals, large carnivores, hoofstock, farm animals, and education animals.
- Assist in the execution of all public and private educational programming and Keeper Chats while utilizing proper speaker systems.
- Present daily interpretive programs to school groups and the general public.
- Assist staff with large events as they relate to animals and the visitor experience.
- Maintain animal record-keeping systems, including utilizing ZIMS Species360 to track animal health, diets, behavior, and veterinary care, especially for animals related to Lead Keeper responsibilities.

- Respond to guest questions and ensure rewarding guest experiences.
- Perform all aspects of animal husbandry, including cleaning enclosures.
- Assist with opening and closing trails in the Park.
- Assist in bison and elk herd management, including spring and fall roundups.
- Participate in and contribute to safe capture training sessions.
- Assist veterinary staff with examinations, vaccinations, and animal training.
- Perform regular inspections of animal enclosures and exhibits, the animal kitchen, diet and food supplies, pastures, Park grounds, fencing, and equipment to ensure proper care and maintenance of animals and facilities.
- Participate in the maintenance and repair of animal exhibits and related systems as needed and originate work orders when necessary.
- Communicate information regarding animals and educational opportunities to the public in an educational and engaging manner; coordinate appropriate presentation of exhibit animals in various formats.
- Ensure animals, staff, and guests are safe and protected from injury or mishap.
- Operate and maintain a variety of tools, vehicles, equipment, and computers.
- Perform enclosure maintenance and safety checks.
- Participate in relevant meetings, workshops, and conferences to stay current with industry best practices.
- Maintain assigned work areas, buildings, storage areas, and animal facilities in a clean, organized, safe, and clutter-free condition.
- Maintain animal enclosures, habitats, and surrounding grounds through routine cleaning, vegetation control, and general upkeep.
- Properly use, maintain, clean, store, and safeguard Park vehicles, tools, equipment, and other Park property.
- Identify and report maintenance, safety, and operational concerns in a timely manner.
- Maintain regular and dependable attendance, work assigned schedules, and follow established departmental policies, procedures, and performance standards.
- Perform other duties as assigned.

Minimum Requirements

Education and Experience

- Bachelor's degree in Environmental Science, Wildlife Biology, Ecology, or a related field and/or equivalent experience.
- Minimum of one (1) to two (2) years of experience in environmental education, interpretation, wildlife, or a related field.
- One (1) to two (2) years of experience as a veterinary technician is highly desirable.

- Previous farm experience preferred, illustrating practical knowledge in animal care and management.
- Experience conducting programs for diverse audiences, including school groups, families, and the general public.
- Valid driver's license required.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities

- Strong knowledge of animal care, behavior, and welfare practices, including species-specific dietary, health, and enrichment needs.
- Familiarity with ZIMS (Zoological Information Management Software) or similar systems for tracking animal health, diet, and behavior records.
- Understanding of basic veterinary care and animal first aid to monitor animal health and administer medications as needed.
- Knowledge of wildlife conservation, native species, and natural habitats.
- Understanding of best practices in interpretive and educational program delivery for various age groups.
- Proficient in safely handling, training, and working closely with animals, including the use of positive reinforcement.
- Strong observational skills for recognizing subtle changes in animal behavior, diet, and health.
- Ability to deliver engaging and informative presentations for public programs and educational events.
- Ability to prioritize daily tasks, animal care routines, and program schedules while ensuring animals receive proper care.
- Ability to follow detailed animal care, health, and dietary protocols while maintaining accurate records.

Interpersonal Skills

- Skilled in listening to audience questions and feedback, allowing for responsive and meaningful interactions during programs and presentations.
- Demonstrates a deep respect and care for animals while fostering a positive environment for their well-being.
- Responds to changing needs, unexpected challenges, and diverse animal behaviors with a calm and solutions-oriented approach.
- Demonstrates a welcoming, positive attitude that encourages visitor interest and creates memorable learning experiences.

- Demonstrates sensitivity to cultural differences and communicates in a respectful and inclusive manner.
- Willingly supports coworkers and volunteers by offering assistance and cooperation to achieve shared goals.

Physical Demands and Working Conditions

This position requires the ability to lift 50–100 pounds (team lift when necessary) and work outdoors in varying weather conditions, including heat, cold, rain, and snow. The position requires walking on uneven terrain and working in animal habitats and other outdoor environments.