



Chris Wilson with an old friend, Tricia.
Photo by Daniel Scarparolo

A Day in the Life of... Chris Wilson, Animal Records Officer

Animal Records Officer Chris Wilson knows about every single animal coming into and going out of the Zoo. Arranging for the transfer of an animal across the country or around the world is a major operation which calls for careful and planned coordination on many different levels. Considerations include state, federal and international laws and regulations concerning the movement of animals between zoos, animal parks, breeding facilities and aquariums.

Zoos are part of a global network where animals are moved around as part of breeding programs to increase the genetic diversity of species held as insurance populations against extinction in the wild.

Chris has been at Perth Zoo for 29 years. "My father worked for Fisheries and Wildlife which is now the Department of Environment and Conservation. I used to travel with him and so got to work closely with animals at a young age. It was always thought that I'd end up working there.

"After leaving school, I got a job at the lion park in Wanneroo. While there, I applied for jobs at the Zoo but it wasn't until nearly a year later, on the day I was nearly eaten by a lion, that the Zoo rang me up and offered me a job. I accepted it immediately.

"For 20 years I worked as a keeper, starting with birds and then moving to the cats and elephants. When the Savannah first opened I was heavily involved with moving the animals into their new homes. A job became available in Animal Records after I suffered a serious back injury and I've been in my current position ever since."

7.30am

Probably the only regular part of my job is entering the daily reports every morning. For every section in the Zoo, there is a daily report with information about the animals including weights, medication, pairings and health. Some can be just a page, others several. All this information goes into a system called the Animal Records Keeping System or ARKS for short. It provides a history of every animal in the Zoo and gives them an individual number. This history can then be used to monitor an animal's health or its behaviour, which can be very useful when the animal moves to another zoo. A new system called ZIMS is being developed at the moment which will have even greater capabilities and can share information globally.

Entering the daily reports can take up to four hours, especially on a Monday when there are Friday, Saturday and Sunday's reports to be entered.

11.00am

There isn't a lot of structure to the rest of my day. It is fairly reactive. For example, international transfers can take all day as I need to get the correct permits and talk to various national and international bodies. At any point in time there can be a number of transfers taking place and I liaise with a range of different officers in agencies from all over the world. Recently I've been handling Temara's transfer to Indonesia, the arrival of Sun Bears from Cambodia, moving two rhinoceros across to New Zealand and bringing a Red Panda into the country. All of these take many hours to finalise and bring to fruition.

I like to think that what I'm doing at Perth Zoo with ARKS and the Records is keeping a history of everything that has come and gone. Many animals have come through the Zoo and, while it may not seem like much, this way there is something left behind to show they were here.