

A Day in the Life of...

Karen Rotherham, Senior Keeper for Asian Carnivores

Karen Rotherham has worked with animals all her life in various roles but finds zoo work the best of all. She worked in a small wildlife park in Ballarat, Victoria, before moving on to Melbourne Zoo where she worked in education and in the carnivore section. Karen moved to Perth Zoo in 1998 to take up a permanent position, working in the Australian section before transferring to the carnivore section.

Karen worked on what was then called 'the cat round' with lions, tigers, leopards, the Sun Bear and Syrian brown bears but the round has since changed to include Sumatran Tigers, the Asian Fishing Cat, Nepalese Red Pandas and Sulawesi Crested Macaques.

"Carnivores is where I belong," she says. "My favourite would have to be Calang, the Sumatran Tiger. He was born at Melbourne Zoo and I worked with his parents while I was there.

"Calang's mum, Poetry, was a sweetie much like Dumai, our hand-raised male, and was very friendly. His dad, Frank, was very aggressive and would jump up on the night quarter walls and scare behind-the-scenes visitors. You had to be very careful and gauge which visitors you would take through. He always managed to scare them though, no matter who they were."

Karen is also involved with the Painted Dog Conservation Group and the Asian Rhino Project. In 2004, Karen completed a 960 km sponsored walk from Perth to Albany along the Bibbulmun Track, raising around \$2,400 for the Asian Rhino Project.

At the moment, Karen is involved with the design of the new Sun Bear exhibit and is looking forward to its completion. She is also studying for her Graduate Diploma in Captive Vertebrate Management.



Karen Rotherham with Aru, the Red Panda

8am

We start the day with a section meeting and look through the daily reports from the day before to see if there are any issues with the animals which have to be taken into account. Then I do a check of the animals to make sure there were no problems during the night.

The tigers aren't fed every day, to replicate feeding patterns in the wild, so the amount of food preparation changes. I feed the Red Pandas first and then the Fishing Cat. If the animals are being fed in their night quarters, I clean the exhibit while they are eating. I'll feed the macaques and then comes the best part of the day—feeding the tigers.

Tigers are fed about four times a week. We usually try to feed them in the exhibit so visitors can see them chomping away. On the days they aren't fed, we give the tigers an 'activity feed' which provides behavioural enrichment for them. While the tigers are in their night quarters, we go into the exhibit and tidy up. The pond is cleaned when needed and we also place behavioural enrichment items around the exhibit. This will include plastic barrels or balls tied to trees and hidden food. When Dumai arrived at Perth Zoo, he had his own teddy bear that we put in the exhibit with him. It is now a little worse for wear, like any well-loved toy.

During the day, I clean other exhibits and dens, check the animals, give enrichment and take care of office work.

When the new Sun Bears arrive, I'll also be slotting them into my schedule. I looked after Suki before he went to Wellington Zoo. I still keep tabs on his progress through emails from his new keeper.

4pm

The animals are given access to their night quarters before I go and write daily reports. Daily reports are necessary to let other zoo keepers know what's going on with each animal. For example, when an animal is pregnant, we need to keep a close eye on her to make sure everything is going smoothly. Daily reports include things like weight and behaviour that may be significant for the animal's health. Also, as I don't work seven days a week, the other carnivore keepers need to know what's going on. We do a final visual check of the animals before going home.

Being a zoo keeper is pretty much a routine, manual job. Each day the animals are fed and their exhibits maintained. But we also have other responsibilities to fit in. It may be animal treatments, training other staff or preparing a report or special presentation. There is always something interesting going on. It's all in a day's work and I wouldn't change it for anything in the world.

