



A Day in the Life of...

Nicole Longhi, Australian Fauna Keeper

Not everyone gets to fulfill their childhood dream but for Australian Fauna keeper Nicole Longhi it's all part of another day's work.

"Penguins have always been my favourite animal and working with them had always been a dream of mine. I studied biology at university before going travelling for five years which included volunteering in Tanzania," Nicole said.

"After I'd seen part of the world, I returned home and enrolled in veterinary nursing while waiting for a job to come up at Perth Zoo. For me it was either get into Perth Zoo or go to Antarctica to work with penguins there. Luckily for me, I didn't have to set off to the Antarctic just yet as I got contract work at the Zoo in 2004.

"I started as a general keeper and worked with cockatoos, penguins and bushwalk animals. I then became a permanent staff member and the opportunity arose to work with just the wetland birds and penguins and that's what my job covers at the moment.

"In 2006 I worked in Cape Town in South Africa for two months as a volunteer at the sea bird rescue centre specialising in looking after oiled and injured African Penguins."

Nicole has also been lucky enough to hand raise a few of the Zoo's penguin chicks when they've been abandoned by their parents.

"Hand raising penguins is fun but it is lots of work. So far I have hand raised four penguins over three years. I look after them until they're eight or nine weeks old which is when they're fully feathered and waterproof. Hand raising involves lots of feeding and they come home with me at the end of the day. Once they've grown a bit I introduce them to other penguins so that they can learn to socialise properly.

"I have a special bond with these hand raised penguins but really I love working with them all. I still want to go to Antarctica but for now I'm very happy to be working with the Little Penguins at Perth Zoo."



A Day in Nicole's Diary

7am: Quick check of the penguins before I go on to food preparation, which involves defrosting fish for the penguins (pilchards and whitebait) and making a mince and egg mix for the wetland birds. I look after over 50 birds so it's a lot of food. I'll then put the food out in the wetlands and this also gives me a chance to check over these birds to make sure they're all doing fine. I'll do a quick cleanup so everything is ready for the public.

It's then time to feed the penguins. They are fed three times a day: 8:15am, 11:30am and 3pm. Some are fed by hand while others are fed in the water.

After morning tea, it's time to clean the dishes and defrost more fish for later in the day. Sometimes I take one of the penguins over to the education classrooms for a lesson where the children are learning about different animal coverings.

If I'm hand raising a chick, their feeds have to fit into my workday as well.

11:30am: Time for the keeper talk. The penguin feed is very popular with visitors and it's also a good opportunity to talk to people about what I love as well as penguin conservation. Plastic bags and fishing line as well as other rubbish are hazardous to penguins and can lead to their death. Oil spills are another problem. After the keeper talk it's time for paper work and more cleaning until lunch.

1pm: After lunch my tasks vary from weeding and exhibit maintenance to providing behavioural enrichment for the animals. A lot of my time is now spent on researching penguin reproduction and behaviour. I go through the camera footage taken from inside the penguins' burrows as well as analysing data from temperature and humidity loggers. One of the exciting things captured on camera is footage of a penguin laying an egg and then placing it correctly for sitting. The information collected will provide us with a better understanding of the penguins' nest box preferences as well as optimal temperatures and humidity for breeding.

2:30pm: The pelicans on the Main Lake get their feed which is an assortment of fish and then it's time to feed the wetland birds and penguins again.

3:30pm: Back to the office, send emails, write my daily reports and leave at 4pm.

