



A Day in the Life of...

Tammy Goncalves, Perth Zoo veterinary nurse

"From as far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a vet nurse," says Tammy Goncalves, veterinary nurse at Perth Zoo. Her career started at age 15 with work experience in a veterinary hospital. She went on to become a qualified veterinary nurse and hasn't stopped working with animals since.

After a number of years as a vet nurse, Tammy's interest turned to Australian wildlife. She would often take injured wildlife home for care and rehabilitation. It was about this time that she began working at Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre. After working there for a while, her sights soon turned to the Zoo. "Veterinary nursing positions in zoos are few and far between," says Tammy.

"I applied whenever an opportunity arose. I was about to give up after several years of applying when I was approached for locum work with the Perth Zoo veterinary department. I jumped at the chance and six months later attained a permanent part time position. I have now been with the Zoo for almost five years."

During this time, Tammy achieved a Certificate of Zookeeping. As a veterinary nurse at Perth Zoo, Tammy also teaches Murdoch University veterinary students who come to the Zoo as part of a two week Zoo and Wildlife Rotation unit.

Tammy is currently studying to align her previous qualification of Veterinary Nursing to the current qualification of Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing.

"In the veterinary department we have two rounds—a quarantine and a clinical round." Tammy explains. "The quarantine round deals with all wildlife and new animals that arrive to become part of the Zoo's collection. The clinical round handles the Zoo's animals that need medical checks and surgery. To prevent transmission of diseases, nurses are assigned to separate rounds which change on a daily basis. Both rounds have separate responsibilities and duties that need to be taken into account each day."

8am

The day starts by checking all the animals in the hospital. The nurses then meet for about 10 minutes to discuss the progress of the patients on the previous day's round. The morning involves feeding, cleaning of enclosures and administering any medications or treatments that may be needed.

10.30am

More often than not, two separate surgeries or medical procedures will be performed at the same time and both nurses will be required to assist. This may include physical examinations under anaesthesia as part of the Zoo's preventative medicine program; microchipping; diagnostic work (ultrasound, endoscopy, radiography, blood collection etc); actual surgery; laboratory work; and cleaning of the surgery equipment afterwards. When the veterinary students are present, the nurse may be required to give a scheduled lecture in the morning or afternoon.

1.30pm

Occasionally procedures may be performed in the afternoon if the day is busy or an emergency arises, however

the afternoon is usually filled with the daily responsibilities of whichever round the nurse is on. Medication and treatments of animals may also be required at this time.

Quarantine round involves food preparation for hospitalised animals, cleaning and emptying enclosures or preparing a temporary home for an incoming animal. It also involves running parasitology tests on all zoo animals.

Clinical round involves maintaining medical equipment in the hospital, stocktaking and ordering medication and hospital supplies.

With both rounds we are responsible for monitoring the animals' physical as well as mental health and ensuring they are kept stimulated by the provision of behavioural and environmental enrichment.

Like most jobs, there is a degree of administrative work. This can involve banking of serum samples for research, collating medical records, researching behaviour, husbandry and diets of different species, and writing papers.

4pm

Afternoon feeds and medications are scheduled. The nurses communicate about their patients using hospital notes which are written up at the end of the shift. If I am not rostered on the next day, I write a handover of any other information required for the nurse rostered on the following day.

For the most part, surgery is generally booked in advance, however, emergencies cannot be predicted. The diversity of species and anatomical differences make this job very interesting. We may operate on a small lizard one day and be required to anaesthetise a lion in its exhibit the next. As you can imagine, preparation is very important with a wild animal. We can't afford for a dangerous animal to wake up during a procedure!

The rounds change on a day to day basis as patients are admitted and discharged but boredom is never a problem as the job is far from routine!

