

Careers in Animal Care

Have you ever wondered about a career working with animals?

Maybe you see yourself as the next “Crocodile Hunter” (the wildlife explorer whose show appears on Animal Planet) or simply a veterinarian for dogs and cats. Thanks to Animal Planet, the “all animals, all the time” cable network, we can watch shows about our animal friends 24-hours-a-day, providing lots of career ideas for animal lovers. From being a veterinarian or wildlife specialist to working in television and creating programs about animals, there are numerous ways you can make a difference for animals in your lifetime.

People who work with animals can have a variety of backgrounds. Usually, one requirement is a great love of animals and a concern for their well being. People who are interested in a career working with animals might take classes in biology, zoology, animal behavior, and animal health sciences in college. Certain careers, such as those working in veterinary fields, require an extensive medical education.

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions a person can make. Your career should make you happy and reflect what you want to give back to the world. People who care for animals can choose from several different career paths. One of those paths is to become a humane professional—these are the people who work at animal shelters caring for homeless pets.

Animal behaviorists

Animal behaviorists learn and observe how animals relate to each other and to people. While an animal behaviorist may work in a variety of animal-related settings, like a zoo or an aquarium, some animal behaviorists work at animal shelters or assist pet owners with pet behavior problems. In this role, the animal behaviorist helps the pet by helping the human companion better understand why pet’s do the things they do. Why does a dog jump on people? Why is the cat not using the litter box? And what can be done to change this behavior. Animal behaviorists may also help shelters identify good-natured pets that should be placed for adoption and work with other pets that might need a little more training before being placed in a good home. This job requires an extensive education in animal behavior.

Animal care attendants

Animal care attendants provide the actual day-to-day care for the shelter pets. They clean kennels, provide food and water to the animals, and may administer medications. It’s a very hands-on job that puts you in direct contact with animals everyday. Some shelters look for volunteers to assist with these duties. It’s a great way to get started working for shelters.

Animal control agency director

An animal control agency director runs a shelter that is funded by the city. They help animals too, providing many of the same services as a humane society. The biggest difference is that animal control agencies are concerned with public safety. They protect people from health risks and the dangers that stray and loose animals can cause to people in the community. They often represent the agency at public functions and manage the overall daily operations of the facility.

Animal shelter veterinarian

An animal shelter veterinarian treats sick or injured animals or provides well-care exams for the animals at the shelter. They are responsible for the individual care of all the shelter pets as well as the health and well-being of the entire shelter population. Shelter veterinarians make sure that the animals coming into the shelter don’t spread diseases to other animals in the shelter. They often spay

and neuter adopted pets to insure they won't contribute to the pet population problem. The job requires an extensive education, including veterinary school.

Adoption counselors

Adoption counselors help people find the right pet for their family's lifestyle. They have to learn about the potential adopter's needs as well as the various personalities of all the animals available for adoption. Making the right match helps ensure that a pet has found a permanent home and won't be returned to the animal shelter. This job is good for someone who likes to work with both people and animals.

Cruelty investigators

Cruelty investigators respond to complaints about people who may be hurting or neglecting their pets. They may work with an animal shelter, animal control facility, or police department handling animal cruelty investigations. Investigators can usually enforce cruelty laws by making arrests or giving citations if only a minor law is broken. Cruelty investigators are like animal detectives. They have to help law enforcement officials and prosecutors collect evidence to prepare an animal cruelty case for trial. This job usually requires training in law enforcement and investigation techniques.

Fundraising specialists

Fundraising specialists help organize special events to raise money for the animal shelter's many programs. Animal shelters can't operate or care for the animals without money to support their programs and services. Animal control agencies usually receive money from the city budget, while humane societies survive on contributions from the community. Fundraising specialists are important to keep the work of the agency going. This job is great for a person who likes to organize events and enjoys working with people.

Humane educators

Humane educators present programs to youth and adults on various humane topics, including pet responsibility, bite prevention, and kindness to animals. Their role is to educate the public and affect the community's view and behavior towards animals. These presentations are often given in schools, at business club meetings, or at the shelter. Teachers or people who have worked in classrooms and are comfortable speaking before groups often fill these jobs.

Humane officers

Humane officers (also known as animal care and control officers) respond to calls about animals that are sick, injured, or neglected. Humane officers must have a good understanding of animal control laws and anti-cruelty laws, since they help educate the public on the responsible care of animals. This job requires some lifting, as humane officers frequently have to transport large or injured animals to the shelter.

Humane society director

A humane society director runs an animal shelter where the ultimate goal is to insure the humane care and treatment of the animals. The director supervises staff and ensures that the shelter's programs and services are helping homeless pets. They also have to find individuals and donors to donate to the agency, since humane societies are funded entirely by private donations. This job usually requires a lot of people skills, as the director usually works more with people in the community than the animals in the shelter.

Public relations specialists

Public relations specialists work with the media to inform the community about the work of the shelter as well as important issues related to the humane care and treatment of animals. They usually

write press releases, newsletters, and other promotional materials to help get the word out on the agency. This is a great job for people who love to write, give media interviews, and speak to the public.

Shelter managers

Shelter managers generally oversee all the activities associated with the daily care and maintenance of the animal shelter and shelter staff. They might handle receiving animals, making sure they are given health checks and vaccinations. Or they may work with the human clients that come into the shelter to adopt or surrender an animal. This job requires supervisory skills and an interest in working with both people and pets.

Veterinary technicians

Some veterinary technicians work at animal shelters, but most work at veterinary hospitals. Their job involves direct contact with both animals and people. Mostly, they assist veterinarians in caring for injured or sick animals or providing healthy animals with well-check ups. They may handle doing lab tests or preparing the operating room for surgery. This job does not require the special education needed to become a veterinarian, but special classes or specific experience with animals can make you more qualified to handle these responsibilities.

Volunteer coordinators'

A volunteer coordinators' job is to find volunteers that want to donate time to help the animal shelter. Volunteer coordinators oversee the scheduling and daily activities of these volunteers for the shelter's special events or daily operations. Often volunteers can only come for a few hours a week or month, so the coordinator has to find lots of volunteers to help cover all the available time slots. Some animal shelters have hundreds of volunteers; some have only a handful of volunteers. But all animal shelters depend heavily on volunteers to provide general animal care, fundraising help, and outreach services to the community.

Volunteering

One final note: If you are interested in working with animals, you can begin before you are out of school by volunteering at a local humane society. Your volunteer work will give you exposure to many different species of animals while performing a great community service at the same time. Also read books on animal careers to see how your interests and concern for animals might become a lifelong career.

This information is from the *Ways to Help Animals As a Career* website maintained by the American Humane Society.

<http://www.americanhumane.org/kids/career.htm#Animal%20Careers>