

For Creative Minds

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Building a Zoo Habitat

Zookeepers work to provide animals in zoos with habitats best suited to their needs. All animals need space, food, water, and shelter, but habitats with these same four elements may look very different.

This Komodo dragon has plenty of space to move around and lots of objects for climbing. Do you think that a Komodo dragon needs more or less space in his zoo habitat than a giraffe?



A thick piece of meat is a tasty treat for this arctic fox. But, zoo animals don't eat the same meals. Who would eat a bale of hay: an elephant or a cheetah? Which animal do you think would rather eat fish: a seal or a chimpanzee?



Rhinoceroses love water. Rhinos drink the water and swim in it. Some animals need lots of water for swimming and playing. Others don't like water, except to drink. Who do you think needs more water in their zoo habitat: a lion or a polar bear?



A leafy tree provides shelter for this red panda. The thick leaves provide shade from the hot sun. Can you think of other kinds of shelters that different animals need in their zoo habitats? What does a lamb need? What does a bat need to roost?

Answers: 1: A Komodo dragon needs less space than a giraffe. 2: Feed the bale of hay to the elephant. Seals love to eat fish. 3: A polar bear needs lots of water to swim and to play. 4: Answers may vary. Lambs live in barns. Bats need caves or trees to roost.

Wildlife Conservation

Some animals are at risk of becoming extinct. When a species becomes extinct, there are no more of that animal anywhere in the world. **Conservation status** indicates whether a species is at risk of becoming extinct.

Zookeepers help conserve and protect whole species through teaching, research, and breeding programs.

To keep local and exotic creatures safe, zookeepers offer “chats” to teach visitors about animals’ habitats and threats. “Citizen science” programs allow people to gather data about issues affecting local species. For example, participants may count frogs in a certain pond. Volunteers may also work with the zoo staff to build or repair areas where animals can safely nest and find ways to help young salamanders or turtles safely cross roads.

Some zoos also work with experts to breed threatened or endangered animals. The babies are released into the wild or moved to different zoos to continue teaching visitors about the animals.

Zoos also support important conservation efforts worldwide. Some zoos raise money and work with organizations that provide habitats for animals to roam. They help hire guards to prevent poaching. Elephants, tigers, apes, and giant pandas are some animals supported by these zoos and organizations.

Some zoos rescue and care for injured or orphaned animals until they can be released back into the wild or another home may be found.

Many of the animals featured in this book are endangered and threatened, including: chimpanzee, colobus monkey, Coquerel’s sifaka, cougar, polar bear, red panda, rhinoceros, snow leopard, and trumpeter swan.



trumpeter swan
Status: Endangered



chimpanzee
Status: Endangered

LC—Least Concern:

A species that is not currently at risk of becoming endangered.

NT—Near Threatened:

A species that may become endangered in the near future.

VU—Vulnerable:

A species that will soon become endangered unless people do something to change the situation.

EN—Endangered:

A species in trouble. It may become extinct if people don’t help.

CR—Critically Endangered:

A species in dire trouble. It is likely to become extinct without immediate help.

EW—Extinct in the Wild:

A species that only lives in captivity. The species still exists only because people take care of it.

EX—Extinct:

A species we’ll never see again. Extinction is forever.

True or False



1. Only exotic animals live in zoos.
2. Baby zoo animals may be fed through a bottle.
3. Zoo animals play with toys.
4. Some animals are born at the zoo.
5. Zookeepers teach tricks to the animals in their care.
6. Zookeepers want mother animals to care for their babies.
7. Keepers always go into adult animals' enclosures to care for them.
8. Zoos may serve as home for an orphaned animal until another home can be found.
9. In hot weather, zoo animals might snack on a Popsicle® or other icy treat.
10. Zookeepers are the same as zoologists.



1. False—All kinds of animals live in zoos. 2. True. 3. True. 4. True. 5. False—
Zookeepers teach animals certain behaviors that make it easier to care for the animal,
but they do not teach tricks. 6. True—Zookeepers want babies to be with their
mothers in the zoo. 7. False—Zookeepers usually care for the animals from outside
the enclosure. It can be dangerous to enter a cage with adult animals. 8. True. 9. True.
10. False—Zookeepers take care of the animals in zoos. Zoologists research and study
animals in the wild and in captivity.

Zookeepers, Zoologists and Veterinarians

Zookeepers and zoo veterinarians both care for zoo animals. They often work together to keep the animals healthy or to give them medicine if they are sick.

Zookeepers take care of exotic and native animals that live in the zoos. They might take care of one species or many animal groups: amphibians, birds, fish, insects, mammals, and reptiles. They prepare food, make sure the animals have plenty of water, clean cages, observe the animals, and help keep them healthy. They may design and build habitats, create enrichment activities, and help train the animals. Zookeepers may help raise the babies born in the zoo. They often work with veterinarians, other caretakers, and volunteers. They often take the lead in educating zookeepers and often answer questions during “Meet the Keeper” programs.



Zoo veterinarians are doctors who specialize in caring for the exotic and native animals that live in zoo settings. Veterinarians diagnose sick animals and prescribe medicine. They may operate on an animal.

Zoologists and wildlife biologists have a specific “animal science” college degree and may research and publish scientific articles about animals. Zoologists study where animals come from, sickness in animals, behavior, and their life cycle. Some zoologists collect data in animals’ native environments to learn more about what affects the animals. Zoologists who study one animal group have specific names:

- Herpetologists study reptiles and amphibians.
- Ornithologists study birds.
- Mammalogists study mammals.
- Ichthyologists study fish.
- Entomologists study insects.

