



Life with the Big Cats & Dogs

Julia Scruggs, Environmental Studies, Texas A&M University
Houston Zoo

The Houston Zoo 🐾

The Houston Zoo, established in 1922, has a mission to educate the public. "The Houston Zoo provides a fun, unique, and inspirational experience fostering appreciation, knowledge, and care for the natural world."

Major areas at the zoo are to promote the many conservation programs around the world. Further evidence of their dedication includes maintaining Association of Zoos and Aquariums accreditation, indicating that they have achieved well beyond their mission caring for the 6,000 animals, or 900 species, in the collection.

The Houston Zoo has excelled at reaching out to the public through social media and has reached record highs of 2.0 million annual visitors. The Zoo hires approximately 375 people on a regular basis and has an impeccable volunteer program with over 600 volunteers.

🐾 Internship Objectives

Since my main focus for this internship is to establish myself as a potential employee for the Houston Zoo, I made sure that I left the best first impression possible. This ties into my end goal to one day work with the Carnivore Department at the Houston Zoo (HZI). So to ensure that I left a good impression, I needed to master daily animal husbandry skills such as cleaning exhibits and holding as well as preparing specific diets for each individual animal.

I planned to learn each species' background, eating habits and the animals' story so I could give a keeper chat to the public. This capsulizes the daily life of a zookeeper, giving me a first hand look at how my life could be. Finally, I needed to successfully complete an internship project that would benefit the HZI as well as leave them with a thank you gift.

Relationship to Career Goals 🐾

This internship was a perfect fit with my career goals. It was reassuring to see that I really love the job that I have dreamed of having. When I met Sara Riger, the Carnivore Department Supervisor, before knowing there was even an internship, I discussed with her what steps she took to end up where she was today. What made the conversation interesting was her path sounded much like the path I was taking, thus encouraging me to continue and look up to Sara as a mentor.

🐾 References

Draper, Ryan. Our Mission Statement. Version 1. Houston Zoo, 2002. Web. 31 July 2014.

N/A. Accreditation Requirements/ Institution Status. Version 1. Association of Zoos and Aquariums, 1997. Web. 31 July 2014.

🐾 Internship Experience

My days started at six every morning, in accordance with the animals' responsiveness on these hot summer days. During the early hours, we followed an orderly schedule for daily rounds, which consisted of cleaning, feeding and training as well as enrichment and general health examinations. Much of the day is consumed by work to educate the public about our animals and conservation efforts promoting the philosophy and mission of the Houston Zoo. To stay focused on our mission, we held regular weekly meetings to maintain AZA accredited status and to support our SSP, or species survival plan. Afterwards, I finished the day developing and testing my conservation project focusing on young adults and social media awareness.

Training: I had countless opportunities to observe the trainers to learn the processes and techniques required. The training approach used is operant conditioning focusing on positive reinforcement. All training is undertaken for the health of the animal so that they are prepared for various health and wellness checkups.

Keeper Chat: Keeper chats were the most nerve-wracking yet satisfying parts of my internship. I spoke one on one with the staff and did research to consolidate my chats. I loved interacting with the public and answering questions. It made me feel part of the Carnivore Department and I was honored to represent HZI.

1. Which form of social media do you use the most? Circle Top 2

Instagram	Facebook	Twitter	Vine	Myspace
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2. Pertaining to a certain issue, which forms of social media would compel you to read more about it/click the link? Circle Top 2

Instagram	Facebook	Twitter	Buzzfeed	Blog	Pinterest	Tumblr
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3. What kind of topics do you tend to view the most? Circle Top 3

Sports	Entertainment	Conservation	News	Political Issues
Animals	Makeup/Shopping	Fashion	Nature	Food

4. When you hear/see the word conservation, what do you think about it? Circle Top 3

Boring	Don't Care	What is it?	Saddening	Unnecessary
Hopeless	Important	Necessary	Crucial	Underrated

5. Why do you think we have zoos? Circle Top 3

A. To look at animals that you cannot see everyday
B. To save animals
C. To raise awareness on endangered species
D. To educate people about conservation
E. For fun

6. When educating someone about conservation, which of the following would be the most appealing/fun to you? Circle Top 4

Blog	YouTube Video	Quizzes	Buzzfeed Quiz	Interactive Game
Conservation Website	Picture Focused	Hashtags	Contains the word "FREE"	

7. Is conservation in general, prominent on social media? And does it grab your attention? Circle 1

Yes	Maybe	No	I don't know	I don't Care
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8. If there were any way you could prevent extinction of endangered species, would you help? (By raising/spreading awareness, donating, trying alternatives to help the environment, etc.) Circle All That Apply

Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat	Neutral/I don't know	Disagree
Strongly Disagree				

Social Media Project: I developed a survey to assess conservation awareness through social media in young adults. The objective was to help HZI get their conservation message to the young adult market who is not currently well represented. Research concluded that Facebook, BuzzFeed and YouTube Videos are the best tools to reach the young adult market.

Most Surprising: What made my internship so incredible was the staff. The animals were spectacular as expected, but the relationships I made with the team are ones that are going to stay with me long-term. Sara Riger, the Carnivore Supervisor, has a unique ability to build a cohesive team that works as one. That is why this department is so successful. And I was fortunate to become close to two women, Sara Riger and Angie Pyle, who I look up to as my long-term mentors. It was an honor to get a glimpse of what my future could possibly look like and I am so excited to work my way there.

Acknowledgements 🐾

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I wanted to leave the Carnivore team with a special thank you for all the time they spent with me this summer. The picture above is a prisma colored pencil, 16X20 drawing of Pandu, a Malayan Tiger at the Houston Zoo. I want to thank Tim Stanley for the original photograph.

