

Student work experience



Work experience is vital for any student wishing to enter into the animal care industries in science, behaviour and conservation. Competition is fierce. Education Officer Vicky Allison-Hughes reports.

The majority of people who work with animals now need a relevant degree and experience before being accepted into a trainee position. They can then further their qualifications and skill on the job.

At the UK Wolf Conservation Trust we had 65 students join us on work placements this year. They received valuable experience during a minimum of two weeks to a maximum of six months. The demand for these placements increases every year. The task of interviewing and allocating the spaces is now the responsibility of Assistant Education Officer and Wolfkeeper Danny Kidby-Hunter. Places fill up at least 12 to 18 months ahead, so it is no small task.

HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE

During their time at the Trust, students are given the opportunity to get involved

at the Trust

in all aspects of our work: they help with school visits, wolfkeeper and photography days and other special visitor events, joining them to listen to any talks taking place. They assist with preparing enrichment sacks and boxes for the wolves as well as hands-on daily jobs like feeding the wolves, first gutting, cleaning and weighing rabbits and deer brought to the Trust, then cleaning the kennels and general maintenance of the site. There are also other essential jobs that may not always be considered when thinking about animal care, such as cleaning the education rooms or preparing and stuffing envelopes for Wolf Print and other mailings that need to go out.

LOOKING AFTER THE WILDLIFE

If this wasn't enough, we also encourage our students to get involved in the care and observation of the wildlife on site. This includes putting out our camera trap to monitor any animal life other than wolves, checking our sun traps to monitor the number of grass snakes on

site, carrying out bird box surveys, to see which are active and what species are using them during spring and summer and planting trees. All of this is important, giving us a good picture of the wildlife the site attracts and how best to preserve and improve the site for these animals.



In 2012 our students began building our bug hotel by the pond, to give the small creatures somewhere to hide and nest. This will be finished this year and we hope that in dry weather we can build sand traps to monitor the tracks of the creatures passing through certain areas of the site.

WHAT DO OUR STUDENTS GAIN FROM THEIR EXPERIENCE?

When we ask the students what experience they hoped to gain by completing a placement at the Trust, we generally find that the majority are looking to improve their care skills or/and to gain familiarity working with a new species. There are not many places where a student can work specifically with wolves and at such close proximity, so it is the practical jobs in which students are most interested.

RESEARCH PROJECTS

All students are encouraged to complete some research work during their placement and the Trust has a library resource and computers to help them with their projects. They pick a new subject and complete an information poster for display to our volunteers and



demonstrate what they have learnt about our ambassador wolves, including any interesting stories during their time with us.

WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM OUR STUDENTS?

There is a growing number of students who are now enquiring about carrying out their studies at the Trust. This is something we have always encouraged, especially non-invasive observational research. This could include watching the interactions between specific animals or a whole pack, observing wolves' reactions to different forms of enrichment or looking at how they use the space in their enclosures. The latter gives us ideas for improving the wolves' environments. A copy of the research is usually submitted upon completion, so that we can make use of the findings if appropriate. We have had students from National Diploma to PhD level studying the wolves.



visitors. They could design a leaflet that may, if appropriate, be used on site, or give a presentation on the subject in which they are most interested. At the end of their placement, every student is asked to give a member of the education team a tour of the Trust. At this point, they can

work-experience students have a full and varied placement here with us and hopefully gain valuable experience that they can take with them into the future.

Vicky Allison-Hughes



RESEARCH AND STUDY OPPORTUNITIES AT THE TRUST

Anyone interested in a placement or wanting to carry out a research project at the Trust is encouraged to visit the Education section of the Trust's website www.ukwolf.org where full application details can be found.