

Zookeeper interview questions

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What to expect

Zookeeper interviews usually mix conversation with practical checks on animal knowledge and judgement, since panels want to see how you think through welfare and safety issues, not just recite facts. Expect questions grounded in daily husbandry routines as well as scenarios that test how you'd respond under pressure.

- **Process:** Questions about how you'd carry out routine tasks such as feed preparation, enclosure cleaning or record-keeping, checking you understand the sequence and the standards behind it.
- **Behavioural:** Past-experience questions about animal observation, teamwork or handling difficult situations, used to see how you've actually applied your skills.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical welfare or safety situations, such as an animal showing distress or an enclosure fault, testing judgement under time pressure.
- **Safety:** Questions on WHS, biosecurity and restraint procedures, since keeper roles carry real physical risk around large or dangerous animals.
- **Client-facing:** Questions on delivering talks or handling visitor behaviour, since education is a core part of the job alongside animal care.

Most zoos run an initial phone or video screening on availability and basic experience, followed by a panel interview with the animal care manager and a senior keeper. Some employers add a site visit or short practical task, such as demonstrating feed preparation or talking through an enclosure check, before making an offer.

1. Walk me through how you'd prepare and deliver a feed for a species you haven't worked with before.

Why they ask

This checks whether you follow proper process rather than guesswork when handling unfamiliar animals, and whether you know when to ask for guidance.

How to structure your answer

Walk through the steps in order: research the species diet sheet, confirm portions and any medical adjustments with senior staff or vet notes, prepare the feed using the correct equipment, and observe intake afterward.

Example answer

"I'd start by checking the diet sheet and any notes in the zoo management software for that individual animal, since portions and supplements can vary between animals of the same species. I'd confirm anything unclear with a senior keeper before preparing the feed, using the right equipment for that food type to avoid cross-contamination. Once it's delivered, I'd stay to observe how much is eaten and log that on the health monitoring chart, because a change in intake is often the first sign something's wrong."

2. Tell me about a time you noticed a change in an animal's behaviour that turned out to be significant.

Why they ask

Behavioural questions like this test observation skills and how you escalate concerns, which is central to the health monitoring side of the role.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and animal, the specific behaviour change you noticed, the action you took, and the result of raising it.

Example answer

"I was doing morning rounds and noticed one of the birds in my section was reluctant to move to its usual perch and hadn't touched its feed from the day before. On its own that could've been nothing, but combined with slightly ruffled feathers it seemed worth flagging. I logged the observation on the health chart and let the vet team know straight away rather than waiting to see if it resolved itself. It turned out to be an early sign of infection, and because it was caught early the treatment was straightforward."

3. An enclosure gate is found unlatched during your rounds and the animal is still inside. What do you do?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure on a genuine safety issue, and whether you follow protocol instead of improvising.

How to structure your answer

Talk through immediate priorities first (safety of self, public and animal), then the reporting chain, then the follow-up check.

Example answer

"My first move would be to secure the gate properly and check the animal seems calm before doing anything else, since a sudden reaction from me could spook it. I'd make sure no visitors were near the enclosure and radio my supervisor immediately to report the fault, even though the animal hadn't gotten out, because near-misses still need to go through the incident process. Afterwards I'd check the rest of that enclosure's hardware in case it's a wider maintenance issue, not just one gate."

4. How do you approach WHS and biosecurity when moving between different animal enclosures?

Why they ask

Cross-contamination and injury risk are constant concerns in zoo work, so panels want evidence you take this seriously as routine, not an afterthought.

How to structure your answer

Explain the standard precautions you'd take, in the order you'd normally apply them, and why each matters.

Example answer

"I'd always use the footbaths and change or clean equipment between enclosures, particularly when moving from a quarantine or unwell animal's space to a healthy group. For anything involving restraint or larger animals, I'd confirm I have the right protective gear and a second keeper present before starting, since WHS procedures in most zoos require a buddy system for higher-risk handling. It becomes routine quickly, but I never skip it just because I'm short on time."

5. How would you handle a visitor who ignores enclosure signage or asks a difficult question during a keeper talk?

Why they ask

Public education is a core task, and this checks you can manage people calmly without compromising animal safety or the visitor experience.

How to structure your answer

Describe the approach for managing the person firmly but politely, and how you'd keep the talk or safety situation under control.

Example answer

"If someone crossed a barrier during a talk, I'd pause and calmly ask them to step back before continuing, explaining briefly why the barrier's there for both their safety and the animal's. For a tricky question, like being asked about a sensitive welfare topic, I'd answer within what I actually know and redirect to a supervisor or the zoo's education material if it goes beyond my area, rather than guessing."

6. What do you look for on a health monitoring chart that would prompt you to call a vet?

Why they ask

This is a technical question checking your working knowledge of the record-keeping tools central to the health monitoring task.

How to structure your answer

List the specific indicators you'd watch for and explain the threshold for escalating, showing you understand both the routine and the exception.

Example answer

"I'd be watching for drops in feed intake over more than a day, changes in stool consistency, reduced activity or any sign of injury noted by a previous shift. A single odd day usually just gets a note, but if I see the same animal flagged two or three days running, or anything acute like limping or refusing all food, I'd call the vet straight away rather than wait for the next scheduled check."