

BTEC ALUMNI CASE STUDY

HOLLY-MARIE MICHAEL

Former BTEC Animal Management student at Brinsbury College and HND in Animal Behaviour and Welfare

Current position: Zookeeper and Education Officer at Tilgate Nature Centre



I run the Education Department at Tilgate Nature Centre alongside working as a Zookeeper. During the pandemic, my role expanded to working as the Australasian section keeper.

How has the pandemic impacted your work?

From a professional point of view, I have had to be more flexible to ensure there is enough staff looking after the animals every day. We have over 500 animals to look after which meant the team and I have had to adapt quickly, researching and learning about new species that I don't normally care for. Learning about their diet and behavior in order to care for them to the best of my ability.

We also have an education programme, the Education Team have explored new ways of providing formal and informal education to learners being homeschooled. This has resulted in a variety of cross curricular activities and covering lots of different topics such as evolution, adaptations and classification. The Education Team are also in charge of the social media for the zoo, we have been making fun videos and activities. This has meant I've learnt a lot about filming and video editing – a skill I never thought I would need working in a zoo!

Working during the pandemic has given me a renewed sense of pride in what my colleagues and I do. It has shown that by working together, even in difficult situations, we always put the care of our animals first. The public support has been brilliant, with many people asking what they can do to support the zoo at this time. I think this situation has made everyone step up and support each other, which is great.

How did your BTEC qualification help prepare you for this current situation?

Whilst studying my BTEC in Animal Management at college I was taught the importance of responsibility; for both myself and the animals I care for. This prepared me for the new responsibilities I have faced at the zoo during this pandemic. Research methods, handling practices and safety information were all covered on my BTEC qualification. This has certainly proved useful when caring for new species.

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What was your own Results Day like?

I was very happy when I passed my course! I was accepted onto the Higher National Diploma course meaning I was able to continue my studies and work towards a career in my chosen industry. During my BTEC in Animal Management I discovered behavior and welfare were my main interests, I went onto study this further at university. My BTEC course enabled me to explore what it was I really wanted to do, and also gave me a good overview of the industry as a whole.

With thanks to Brinsbury College and Holly