

## Staff Profile – Susannah McGinnes

*Dreaming about turning your love for your humble pet goldfish or rabbit into an exciting career with animals such as Antarctic Penguins? Susannah McGinnes describes the passion, creativity and dedication required for her job as a Penguin Keeper at Melbourne Aquarium.*

### **When did you decide you wanted to work with animals?**

I've always had an amazing love for animals. My passion started at a really young age through caring for family pets, such as rabbits and goldfish, and I always tried to help out any sick or injured wildlife near my home.

When I went to university to study Zoology, I realised that there are so many different careers where you can work with animals - from being a dog and cat vet to researching apes in the wild. It was at university that I decided that I wanted to be an animal keeper.

### **How did you get started in the industry?**

While studying Zoology at university, I volunteered to do work experience at Sydney Aquarium and the Australian Reptile Park, which provided me with valuable practical knowledge to support my studies.

Two weeks after completing my degree, I was lucky enough to get a job as a Dolphin Care Officer at Tangalooma Wild Dolphin Resort on Queensland's Moreton Island. During the day I would take out whale watching and dolphin spotting cruises, as well as feed pelicans and kookaburras – but the absolute highlight was feeding a pod of wild dolphins each night.

These wonderful water-based experiences lead me to Melbourne Aquarium, where I have worked as an education officer teaching school children, with the curatorial team looking after sea jellies and now in my dream job as an Antarctic Penguin Keeper!

### **What type of penguins do you look after at Melbourne Aquarium?**

King and Gentoo Penguins are the two species featured in Melbourne Aquarium's new Antarctica exhibit.

Gentoo Penguins are active little characters with an endless supply of energy. They are curious and outgoing and will investigate and interact with anything new. The Gentoos are very vocal and will often call out to each other with a honking sound and sing together in a loud chorus.

The Kings are the more regal and majestic of the two species, but their vibrant yellow-orange colouring makes them mesmerizing animals to watch. King Penguins are quite aloof in nature and they will stick together in a group, ignoring their cheeky Gentoo neighbours.

### Describe a day in the life of a penguin keeper...

I get to work early at about 7.30am and the first thing I do is get changed into warm clothes and gumboots. When you work in subzero temperatures, you learn the importance of wearing lots of layers – I generally wear thick socks, thermals, a fleecy jumper, thick gloves and a beanie.

Then I settle into a hard morning of work that includes cleaning the exhibit, washing away all the penguin poo, scrubbing all of the rocks and surfaces in the exhibit and shovelling and raking the snow. Once the exhibit is clean, I am ready to prepare the morning food for the penguins, which is usually fish such as herring. I also feed the penguins in the afternoon through a surface feed at the pool, where the penguins are fed smaller fish such as sprats or baby salmon. Other tasks I perform during the day include water testing, observing and recording the penguins' behaviour, weighing them, giving them toys and playing games with them, and even trimming their toenails!

### What are the best and worst things about being a penguin keeper?

The most amazing feeling is when a penguin waddles up and sings a song just for you. The worst thing is getting pooped on by a penguin!

### What advice would you give to someone who is thinking about working with animals?

There are lots of different ways to get a job with animals, a good start is to study science subjects at school and then you can go on to study zoology, marine biology, animal management or vet nursing at TAFE or university. Practical experience is very valuable, so don't be afraid to volunteer at any place with any type of animal. You could try zoos, aquariums, animal shelters, vet surgeries, farms, pet shops or even walking the neighbours' dog. It's also great to keep your own pets such as parrots, rabbits, cats, or even stick insects.

### What are the three qualities a person would need to have to do your job?

**Passion** – It's important for animal keeper to be passionate about animals and enthusiastic about sharing your excitement with others.

**Hard-working** – It can be tough shovelling snow and scrubbing rocks clean in a penguin enclosure that is minus-2 degrees, so you'll need to be able to handle lots of hard work in some pretty tough conditions!

**Creative** – You need to be able to come up with new ideas to solve problems, such as creating a new enrichment program to keep your animals entertained.

### FAST FACTS

<b>Name:</b>	Susannah McGinnes
<b>Age:</b>	23
<b>Birthplace:</b>	Parkes, New South Wales
<b>Residence:</b>	Melbourne, Victoria
<b>Occupation:</b>	Penguin Keeper at Melbourne Aquarium
<b>Qualifications:</b>	Bachelor of Science (Zoology) and Grad. Cert. of Captive Vertebrae Management
<b>Hobbies:</b>	Scuba diving, art, reading and horse riding