



Zoo Edition Archives -Spring/Summer 2008

Excerpts from an interview with David Shepherdson, Deputy Conservation Division Manager at Oregon Zoo

WPZ:What is your job title and what duties does that entail?

DS: I'm the Deputy Conservation Division Manager, which entails coordinating Oregon Zoo's field conservation and research programs.

WPZ: What type of education and previous work experience is valuable for this job?

DS: I have a PhD in Animal Behavior. In general, I think having an advanced degree in biology with a focus on conservation, ecology or animal behavior would give you a good background. As for work experience, certainly work in the field at some point is important, as is previous zoo experience.

WPZ: Can you describe a typical work day?

DS: One of the characteristics of the job is that there are few typical days. The variety of work is definitely one of the appeals. Certainly there is a lot of communication involved, which these days consists of a lot of email. There's grant writing and budget management, as well as coordinating activities of our own zoo staff with those of agencies outside of the zoo, such as state and governmental agencies. We want to make sure that our programs mesh with their needs and vice versa. I'm also involved in a good deal of education. After all, my job falls within the education department. And I'm occasionally out in the field! There's other travel as well, both nationally and internationally, for conferences and workshops.

WPZ: How do zoos play a role in amphibian conservation?

DS: There are a few main ways that zoos play a role. The biggest impact in my opinion is telling people the plight of amphibians locally in the hopes of motivating them to change the way they behave. That, in turn, benefits amphibians globally. Zoos can also help encourage people to give money to benefit amphibian conservation. Also, zoos can directly play a role in amphibian conservation because we have the expertise in rearing animals in captivity and releasing them in the wild. These also make for very engaging stories themselves. For example, Oregon Zoo is involved in Oregon spotted frog conservation, which Woodland Park Zoo is joining as well. In this, Oregon spotted frog egg masses are brought in from the field, raised at these facilities, and then released back into restored wetlands. Other zoos around the United States and around the world are doing similar programs with different species, especially with particularly hard hit species.

WPZ: And Oregon spotted frog conservation is a focus of the NW Zoo & Aquarium Alliance?

DS: Yes, the newly formed NW Zoo & Aquarium Alliance allowed three zoos to get together very quickly and offer help to Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife with a critical amphibian conservation issue. There are other amphibian species in the Pacific Northwest that may also benefit from an element of captive rearing.

WPZ: What advice do you have for kids who want to make a difference?

DS: There's all sorts of information out there. Certainly your local zoo's websites have all sorts of great information on how you can help. A big issue affecting amphibians and other wildlife is global climate change. Using less energy is important, for example, cycling and walking instead of using a car. Buying locally grown food is great. Reducing the heat in the home and wearing sweaters helps. Being mindful of the energy you use and looking for alternatives. Buying organic and recyclable products helps. Kids can also help amphibians by being aware of their effect on wetlands. For example, don't use herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers on your yards. Don't put anything down the drain that could harm wetlands. Also, don't use too much water with long showers or leaving the water running while brushing your teeth. Collect rain water to water your yard. If you're old enough to vote, you can vote for politicians with conservation friendly policies. There's a huge number of things individuals can do. There's no excuse for inaction!