



## Zoo Edition Archives - Spring 2011

### Career Corner

Excerpts from an interview with Janel Kempf, WPZ Animal Outreach Education Specialist

**WPZ:** What does a typical day look like?

**JK:** I have a couple of different types of typical days. Most days, I have an Up CLOSE program at a school, usually in the morning. I'll arrive early, often before the zookeepers, and put the birds I need to use in their travel boxes. I'll then load them into the van, drive to the school, and present the program. When I come back, I take out whatever bird I used and "man" them, which means simply hanging around outside with the bird on your falconry glove, bonding with them in a low-stress situation.

On days without a program, I have more time to socialize and train birds. Sometimes this is manning birds I haven't had a program with in a few days to maintain our bond. Right now, we have a brand-new American kestrel, which is just learning to stand on a gloved hand and go in a travel box, so I spend time every available day working with it on that.

**WPZ:** You have to hold the birds for a long time. Doesn't that get heavy?

**JK:** You'd think so, but the birds are extremely lightweight. Our great horned owl, for example, weighs only about 2. pounds!

**WPZ:** What could I do to get a job like yours?

**JK:** There are actually a lot of different routes that can lead to jobs like mine. Nearly everybody who does this sort of work has a bachelor's degree, and quite a few have more advanced degrees. Commonly, people will have degrees in biology, wildlife management, zoology, or something similar, but there are people who have degrees in fields you'd never imagine, like art!

The actual work with raptors is entirely on-the-job training. I worked my way into being trained on raptors here at WPZ after starting with other presentation animals, like reptiles. Others start out volunteering at a zoo or wildlife rehabilitation center.

Last, a really useful thing to have is public speaking skills. I was in my high school drama club, for example.

**WPZ:** How can we help raptors?

**JK:** The absolute easiest thing anyone can do to help raptors is this: never throw those last few cold French fries or that apple core out your car window on a road trip. Why? There are lots of folks who would never consider throwing a plastic cup out the window, but figure a bit of food waste is fine – it'll decompose or some animal will eat it. That's true, an animal will eat it, probably a rat or mouse. And because so many people toss out food scraps, there are lots of rodents hanging around roadsides. And, where there are lots of rodents, there are lots of raptors, all swooping down toward the freeway at high speeds, not knowing to look out for speeding cars. In some areas, being hit by cars is the main threat to raptors. So, always wait for that rest area trash can or bring your food scraps home for composting, and you've probably saved a raptor's life!