

Richard Barnes – Head of Large Carnivore Section at Port Lympne Wild Animal and Safari Park, Kent

Richard Barnes is passionate about cats and dogs, but it's not your regular domestic cat or dog that interests Richard. Richard heads up a team of five people, responsible for looking after Benegal and Siberian Tigers, Cheetahs, Lions, Snow Leopards and African Wild Dogs and has been working with animals since 1996 and joined Port Lympne in 2000.

Although Richard admits that every day is different, a typical day involves an animal check to ensure that all cats/dogs are present and that all the fences/enclosures are secure, feeding and cleaning duties, medication, enclosure maintenance plus observation gathering and record keeping. The big cats are fed every four days and the African dogs feed every other day – this is to mimic hunting success in the wild.

Richard has a great relationship with all of the animals he cares for. The lions are really affectionate especially Suliman, an endangered Atlas Lion who is extremely friendly and gentle and likes nothing more than being scratched! But his favourite animals have to be the African Wild Dogs because they have a great personality and are real characters.

The favourite part of Richard's job is conservation, he is passionate about getting people involved in conservation and keeping and breeding endangered species. Port Lympne is part of the Aspinall Foundation whose objectives are to halt the extinction of rare and endangered species in the wild.

When asked about the negative aspects of his job, Richard admits that there is nothing he doesn't enjoy about the job and how many people could say that after being in the same career for 13 years?

Richard's tips for becoming a keeper:

If you want to be a keeper, you'll already have an interest in animals and be passionate about the conservation of wildlife, but you'll also need to be prepared to work long hours and be reasonably fit as the work of a keeper is physically demanding.

Richard also gives regular talks and presentations to the public, so it is important that you enjoy working with people as well as animals.

Although it is often hard work, a keeper's job offers many rewards. Seeing your animals thrive and produce offspring which may be released into the wild in the future is the ultimate in job satisfaction.

You will need five GCSE passes preferably in English, Maths and science, plus experience of working with animals, either paid or voluntary but not necessarily with wild animals. There are also a number of qualifications available from NVQ's to Zoological degrees.

Howletts & Port Lympne Wild Animal Parks, Kent – www.totallywild.net

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For further information please contact Laura Swann or Alexandra Hill at Hamilton PR on 01892 546599 or email laura@hamiltonpr.co.uk; alex@hamiltonpr.co.uk;

Notes to Editors:

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- Visit Kent is working with Southeastern on the 2FOR1 London campaign throughout the Summer months
- A large selection of Kent attractions/accommodation/restaurants/retail outlets have supplied 2FOR1 tickets. A full list can be found on the website visitkentbytrain.co.uk
- There are 182 Southeastern stations on the Kent rail network