## **Visitor Services Coordinator**

**Interview Video Link:** https://youtu.be/zlks-AM7Avs

**Job Title:** Visitor Services Coordinator for Cascades Raptor Center

**Job Description:** “I oversee or assist with just about everything related to the public side of our organization – managing the visitor center, recruiting, training, and scheduling the volunteers who staff it, purchasing merchandise, designing and printing onsite signage, updating our website representing the organization at community events.”

**Ways to Volunteer, Intern, Learn More, Etc:**

“Volunteering or interning is usually the best way to get hands-on knowledge of this field, but you can also learn a lot by talking to professionals who are willing to be candid. If you volunteer somewhere, especially if you are working directly with animals, focus on learning and copying how people do things at that specific organization instead of trying to impress staff with whatever you already know. Be a sponge, not a megaphone.

If you’re interested in a particular field, professional organizations for that industry can be good resources. You can often learn a lot about the state of the field from their websites and industry periodicals. One of the premier such organizations for animal facilities in America is the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, which maintains a job board and publishes a magazine. If you want to go into wildlife education or husbandry, interning at a facility accredited by the AZA can be an excellent credential.

Also, be patient and understanding if an organization you’re interested in doesn’t seem very accessible – they aren’t hiring, or don’t have open volunteer positions, or don’t do job shadows or informational interviews. Many of them are so swamped and have so many people asking to volunteer or interview that their ability to respond to these inquiries is not what they would like.”

**Advice From the Professional:** "Time to be honest here: this is a field with epidemic levels of martyr complex and burnout. There is no failure or shame in trying it for a few years and finding it is not sustainable for you. You can always roll over into another field and continue doing wildlife work as a volunteer. If you decide you want to stay for the longer term, you need to take very, very good care of yourself and know your limits. There will always be people or animals in need, or functions that aren’t being attended to, and it can frequently feel like if you don’t step up no one will. (Note: big facilities struggle with this just as much as small ones. You cannot really escape this effect by going to a place with more money.) Compounding this is the fact that at many animal organizations, the greatest respect is afforded to the people who sacrifice the most for the work, which is not a healthy culture. I am very fortunate to not be in this position but it can greatly exacerbate an already untenable situation. This is one reason I very strongly recommend volunteering first before going into paid work in this field; I learned all of this from observing staff at places I volunteered or interest, so that when I took my current job I came in forewarned and was able to avoid some of this effect (though not all of it).

One other thing I think doesn’t get discussed enough: the importance of customer service skills in all positions at wildlife organizations. If you are looking to work with/around animals because you think it means you can avoid the public, I guarantee you will be disappointed. Even if your position is less public-facing you will be called on to represent the organization in some way – answering a phone call, picking up an animal from a finder, giving directions to a visitor. Your ability to be appreciative, helpful, and tactful with that person can make or break their impression of the entire organization.”

**Average Salary:**

$19/hour, paid health insurance, sick leave, and about 3 weeks of paid time off.

**Contact Information:**

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