

Colchester Zoological Society is home to over 150 species and is dedicated to supporting conservation projects around the globe. As an award-winning visitor attraction with over 1 million guests visiting each year, every staff member at the Zoo works together to ensure that our guests have an enjoyable and unforgettable experience.

JOB TITLE: **Head Keeper**

An exciting position has arisen for an experienced Head Keeper to join our team and contribute to our mission at CZS in a full-time role working within our animal department.

JOB SUMMARY: As Head Keeper, the candidate will sit on the Animal Management Team and will be required to input ideas for the continual progression and development of animal husbandry, breeding management and enclosure design across the Zoo.

The candidate will work closely with the 10 animal section Team Leaders to oversee and drive forward high standards of husbandry and welfare for all species. The job holder will be responsible for coordinating the activities of the Team Leaders and their staff members to ensure safe working protocols, practices and risk assessments for working in and around the species on the sections.

The Head Keeper will sit on the Species Planning Committee and will have additional responsibility for maintaining communication between the Committee and Team Leaders with respect to species planning for sections, rolling this out via organisation of transfers, assisted by the Zoological Department Administrator. They will also represent CZS in national and international forums to fulfil this role.

- MAIN JOB PURPOSE:**
- 1.** Ensure continual progression and development of animal husbandry, breeding management and enclosure design across the Zoo
 - 2.** Ensure safe working protocols, practices and risk assessments for working in and around the species on animal sections
 - 3.** Coordinate species planning activities for the zoological collection
 - 4.** Represent CZS in external settings where required

**MAIN
RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Be part of the Animal Management rota to ensure the optimal number of managers are in daily and act as Animal Duty Manager when needed.
- Be part of the Zoo management opening and locking up rota during normal operational hours, or during late night events.
- Provide out of hours emergency cover / be an out of hours emergency contact for the emergency services.
- Attend weekly Animal Management meetings, inputting ideas for the continual progression and development of animal husbandry, breeding management and enclosure design across the Zoo.
- Oversee and drive forward high standards of husbandry and welfare for all species, identifying and prioritising jobs across sections to ensure the highest standards are being achieved.
- Routinely carry out section inspections and provide continuous feedback on section standards.
- Coordinate the activities of the animal department to ensure safe working protocols, practices and risk assessments for working in and around the species on the sections.
- Provide support and assistance with animal restraints/catch ups and help staff plan in advance for this purpose for events such as animal transfers, vet days etc.
- Respond to requests from sections for maintenance needs, liaising with the Estates and Maintenance Department to ensure job requests are completed in the correct manner.
- Sit on the Emergency Response Team as Incident Manager where needed and/or assist with the recapture of escaped animals via use of firearms and darting equipment (if licenced).
- Maintain darting equipment and stock and ensure records are up to date and protocols in place for the use and training of darting equipment (if not licenced, this job role will be diverted to another team member).
- Coordinate the plans of the Species Planning Committee by initiating animal transfers, in conjunction with the Zoological Department Administrator. Ensure prompt correspondence with breeding programme coordinators, that all necessary paperwork and arrangements are made and that legislation is adhered to.
- Support other Animal Management team members in their roles as needed / in their absence.
- Represent CZS on a national and international level by attending and presenting at courses and conferences and by sitting on committees where appropriate.
- Represent CZS in the media including radio and TV interviews where required.

OTHER KEY ACTIVITIES:

- Demonstrate commitment to continuous personal development
- Perform other duties as reasonably directed by the Animal Management Team

WORKING HOURS: This is a full-time position. An average of 40 hours a week (5 days) which will include regular weekend work and will increase in busy periods.

UNIFORM: Full uniform must be worn at all times. Uniform (including boots) will be provided.

SALARY: £39,520 per annum

EVALUATION: For the first five months of employment, the jobholder will be asked to complete a one month, three month and five month self-assessment. This will gauge their feelings of the job and assess their progress towards meeting targets.

WORKING ENVIRONMENT:

- CZS is a non-smoking environment and smoking is not permitted by members of staff whilst on the premises.
- CZS is an equal opportunities employer.
- You may be required to work offsite on animal transfers on occasion.

Whilst doing this job, the employee is likely to be exposed to:

- Category 1/1A animals
- Outside weather conditions
- Tropical exhibits with high temperatures
- Moving mechanical parts
- Toxic or caustic chemicals
- Lifting heavy loads

HEAD KEEPER SPECIFICATION

	Essential	Desirable
HUSBANDRY SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE	<p>10+ years' experience in a zoological collection, including extensive experience with category 1/1A species</p> <p>Proven ability to oversee and drive forward the overall standards of the animal department, with respect to animal husbandry, breeding management and enclosure design</p> <p>Excellent knowledge of ZIMS</p> <p>Knowledge of water quality parameters and management for a range of species</p> <p>Experience in operating filtration systems and life support systems</p> <p>Knowledge of uv requirements for a range of species</p> <p>Extensive knowledge of zoo licencing and legislation with experience in conducting licencing and accreditation processes</p> <p>Excellent skills in handling and restraint of various species</p> <p>High confidence and ability in dealing with medical issues</p>	
SPECIES PLANNING	<p>Experience collaborating with various teams to produce an Institutional Species Plan</p> <p>Experience liaising with BIAZA and EAZA advisory groups and breeding programme coordinators and fulfilling their requests (e.g. questionnaires and recommendations)</p> <p>Experience networking on the BIAZA and/or EAZA level</p>	
TEAMWORK AND ABILITY TO FOLLOW INSTRUCTION	<p>Proven ability in coordinating an animal department team, working to prioritise activities</p> <p>Proven ability to work in an Animal Management Team and contribute to team goals</p> <p>Proven ability to harness positive relationships with all other team members/departments regardless of level/section</p> <p>Ability to follow instruction and carry out tasks at Animal Management team's request</p>	

	Essential	Desirable
LEADERSHIP AND MENTORING	<p>Proven ability to mentor and allocate work duties to animal section staff</p> <p>Ability and willingness to lead internal zoo subgroups and committees</p> <p>Ability and willingness to lead internal training at CZS</p>	
HEALTH AND SAFETY	<p>Ability to manage risk in a zoo environment and with category 1/1A species</p> <p>Excellent understanding and ability to produce risk assessments and ensure these are followed through on the animal sections</p> <p>Ability to ensure safe working practices at the Head Keeper level and develop these around the animal department</p> <p>Ability to develop safe working protocols for category 1/1A species and ensure these are followed through on the animal sections</p> <p>Excellent understanding of zoo emergency procedures and experience coordinating drill events and/or overseeing emergency events</p> <p>Experience acting as duty manager and/or providing emergency response cover</p>	
COMMUNICATION AND PRESENTATION SKILLS	<p>Excellent communication and presentations skills to deliver media interviews</p> <p>Ability and willingness to represent CZS at external conferences and present where necessary</p>	
SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE	<p>Computer literate with excellent knowledge of the major Microsoft Office programmes</p> <p>Excellent written skills, including record keeping</p> <p>Excellent written skills, including proposals and protocols</p>	

	Essential	Desirable
OTHER	Animal-related qualification Full driving licence Proven ability to use own initiative to solve problems Hard working and highly motivated Excellent punctuality and time keeping Dependable and trustworthy Flexible and adaptable Warm, open-minded and professional Commitment to employment at CZS	Leadership / management qualification Firearms licence

HOW TO APPLY

If you are interested in applying, please complete the **CZS Employment application form**. Please ensure all sections of the application form are completed, do not enter 'Refer to CV'.

Send your CV and completed Employment Application Form to **Rebecca Moore, by email to vacancies@colchesterzoo.org**

Closing date is **30th April 2026**.

Please be aware that we will only process applications that include a completed application form and CV. We do have a lot of interest in our vacancies, if you have not heard from us after four weeks of submitting your application you should assume you have not been successful on the occasion.

**SECTION FOUR – Continuous Professional Development, other training, current study
(type in information)**

Qualification (Inc. grade)	School / University / Institution	Date Achieved

**SECTION FIVE – Membership of Professional Body, include any offices held
(type in information)**

Qualification (Inc. grade)	School / University / Institution	Date Achieved

SECTION SIX – CURRENT / MOST RECENT EMPLOYMENT (type in information)

Job Title:		Current Job:	
Employer:			
Start Date:		End Date:	
Salary:			
Main duties and responsibilities:			
Notice Period:			
Reason for leaving:			

SECTION SEVEN – PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT: (type in information)			
Job Title:		Current Job:	
Employer:			
Start Date:		End Date:	
Salary:			
Main duties and responsibilities:			
Notice Period:			
Reason for leaving:			

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT CONTINUED... (type in information)			
Job Title:		Current Job:	
Employer:			
Start Date:		End Date:	
Salary:			
Main duties and responsibilities:			
Notice Period:			
Reason for leaving:			

PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT CONTINUED... (type in information)				
Job Title	Employer	Start Date	Leave Date	Reason for leaving

GAPS IN EMPLOYMENT – please specify reasons and dates for any gaps in employment (type in information)

SUPPORTING INFORMATION - Please provide any information in support of your application. This should provide us with evidence of the skills, knowledge, personal attributes, competence and experience to carry out with the role for which you are applying (type in information)

REFERENCES – Please give the details of two referees, one should be your current or most recent employer (i.e. you line manager or Head of Department) References from family or friends are not accepted if you have an employment history (type in information)

Title:		First Name:	
Can the reference be contacted?		Surname:	
Job Title:			
Address:			
Email:		Telephone:	
Relationship:			

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Can the reference be contacted?		Surname:	
Job Title:			
Address:			
Email:		Telephone:	
Relationship:			

DISABILITY – Do you require any special arrangements to be made to participate in the selection process on account of a disability? If yes, please give brief details (type in information)

CONVICTIONS – Have you ever been convicted of a criminal offence i.e. cautions, reprimands or warnings? If yes, please give details of any unspent convictions.

DECLARATION: Please read carefully before signing this application

I confirm that the above information is complete and correct and that any untrue or misleading information will give my employer the right to terminate any employment contract offered. I agree that the organisation reserves the right to require me to undergo a medical examination. (Should we require further information and wish to contact your doctor with a view to obtaining a medical report, the law requires us to inform you of our intention and obtain your permission prior to contacting your doctor). I agree that this information will be retained in my personnel file during my employment and for up to six years thereafter and understand that information will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act. I agree that should I be successful with this application, I will, if required apply to the Criminal Records Bureau/Scottish Criminal Records Office for a basic disclosure. I understand that should I fail to do so, or should the disclosure not be to the satisfaction of the company, any offer of employment may be withdrawn or my employment terminated.

Signed:

Date: