

Full or Part-Time Lead Exotic Animal Keeper 2026

Animal Educators

Valley Center & Pauma Valley, California

Position Type: Full-Time (40+ hours/week) or Part-Time negotiable

Starting Wage: \$22.00/hour plus benefits and possible onsite housing

Start Date: Immediate

Position Summary

Animal Educators is seeking a highly motivated, experienced **Lead Exotic Animal Keeper** to join our professional animal care team. This position is responsible for the daily husbandry, behavioral observation, environmental maintenance, record keeping, and welfare of a diverse collection of ambassadors and exhibit animals.

We are seeking an individual with a minimum of **3–5 years of professional experience working with and training exotic animal species** who demonstrates excellent husbandry skills, sound judgment, professionalism, and a commitment to animal welfare, conservation education, and public engagement.

This position requires an individual who understands that animal care extends beyond scheduled work hours. The successful candidate must recognize that the welfare of the collection may require weekend, holiday, overtime, or emergency response as needed.

Employment is contingent upon the successful completion of a **six-month probationary period**, during which competency in husbandry practices, behavioral management, teamwork, and institutional standards will be evaluated.

Essential Duties and Responsibilities

Responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

Animal Husbandry

- Prepare and distribute species-appropriate diets according to established protocols.
- Prepare whole-prey diets, including skinning rabbits and/or rats when required.
- Feed and water assigned animal collection.
- Perform daily cleaning and sanitation of animal enclosures, holding areas, food preparation spaces, and associated work areas.
- Maintain exhibits to promote animal welfare and appropriate environmental conditions.

Animal Health & Welfare

- Conduct daily behavioral and physical observations of assigned animals.
- Recognize normal versus abnormal behavior and identify early indicators of illness, injury, stress, or aggression.
- Communicate observations promptly to supervisory staff.
- Administer medications and assist with veterinary procedures as directed.
- Safely restrain and handle animals for husbandry, medical care, and educational programming.

Behavioral Management

- Demonstrate the ability to accurately interpret species-specific behavior and body language.
- Anticipate and appropriately redirect escalating behaviors before they develop into unsafe situations.
- Participate in behavioral management and conditioning programs utilizing established husbandry protocols.
- Successfully learn the behavioral management techniques necessary to safely work within an established group of otters (training provided).

Facility Maintenance

- Perform minor enclosure repairs and maintenance.
- Assist with exhibit landscaping and grounds maintenance as necessary.
- Maintain a clean, organized, and safe work environment.

Records & Compliance

- Complete accurate daily husbandry records.
- Maintain medical, behavioral, feeding, and enrichment documentation as required.
- Ensure all records meet institutional standards and applicable permit and regulatory requirements.

Team Participation

- Work both independently and collaboratively within a team of approximately 5–10 staff members.
- Maintain professional communication with coworkers and supervisors.
- Demonstrate flexibility in scheduling and assist other departments when operationally necessary.

Required Qualifications

Applicants must possess:

- **Minimum 3–5 years of professional exotic animal training and husbandry experience**
- Demonstrated knowledge of animal behavior, enrichment, and welfare principles
- Ability to prioritize animal welfare in all aspects of husbandry
- Excellent observational and organizational skills
- Strong verbal communication and teamwork abilities
- Ability to work independently following training

- Valid driver's license
 - Successful completion of a criminal background check
 - Successful completion of a post-offer physical examination verifying the ability to perform essential job functions
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Physical Requirements

This position is physically demanding and requires the ability to:

- Frequently lift and carry up to **50 pounds**
 - Perform repetitive bending, kneeling, climbing, pushing, and pulling
 - Work outdoors year-round in varying environmental conditions, including heat, cold, rain, and uneven terrain
 - Safely perform physically demanding animal husbandry duties over extended periods
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Professional Expectations

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

- Exceptional reliability and attendance
 - Strong work ethic and personal accountability
 - Calm, professional decision-making in dynamic situations
 - Respect for institutional policies and established husbandry protocols
 - An evidence-based approach to animal management that avoids anthropomorphism and recognizes species-specific behavioral needs
 - Commitment to continual learning and professional development
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Compensation & Benefits

Starting Salary

- \$22.00/hour
- Approximately **\$44,000 annually**

Benefits

- Medical benefits valued at approximately **\$5,400 annually**
- Two weeks paid vacation (approximately **\$1,760 annually**)

Housing

- Possible onsite housing (approximately **\$18,000 annually**)

Estimated Total Annual Compensation:
\$69,160

About Animal Educators

Animal Educators is dedicated to providing exceptional lifetime care for the animals entrusted to us while inspiring conservation through education, ambassador animal programs, and meaningful public engagement. Our team is committed to maintaining the highest standards of animal welfare, professionalism, and ethical husbandry.

Applicants who possess the experience, dedication, and passion required to care for a diverse collection of exotic animals are encouraged to apply. Resumes and cover letters can be sent to wyates3401@gmail.com.