

What's the Scoop at your Niabi Zoo

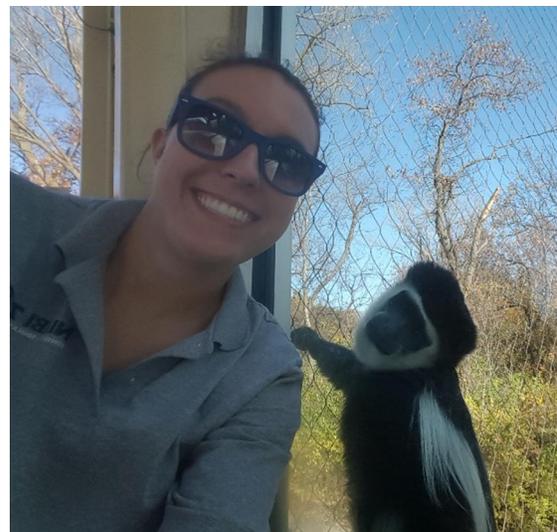
Welcome to Wild Wednesday Keeper Edition. We're exploring each animal department throughout the Zoo and looking at which keeper calls that area their own. Today we are looking at String 1, which covers Primates and program animals. The primary keeper in that area is Laura Ellison. Laura has been at the Zoo as a full-time keeper for a little over a year, but like a lot of our keepers, her interest started with an internship.

Laura graduated from Augustana with a degree in Biology. Though she started as a pre-vet student, she discovered that wasn't for her and was able to get an internship here at the Zoo, discovering that being out with the animals suited her better. Laura continued her studies at Western University in their Zoo and Aquarium studies and when a keeper position opened up here at Niabi, she joined the team.

Laura has been at the Zoo a little over a year and has worked primarily with the primates, which include our Buff Cheeked gibbons and our Eastern Black and White Colobus Monkeys. Working with the primates has made Laura realize how individual each of the primates are, which is so important in the care for these animals. By using observation skills and noting individual preferences, who gets along with who, this allows her to notice differences in behaviors that might indicate someone not feeling well or changes in the troop. Observational skills are also very important during the training process with the primates, capturing behaviors and working with individual animals. This is one of Laura's favorite parts of keeper work because it helps to reinforce the bond she has with the animals, making husbandry and medical procedures easier when the animals trust her.

Our primate area is also a participant in the SSP (Species Survival Plan) with our Colobus monkeys. A Species Survival Plan is a breeding program that works with Zoos across the country to ensure strong genetics in captive populations. The Colobus monkeys here at Niabi Zoo are genetically diverse, with our breeding program contributing animals to other facilities across the country and even into Canada! Zoos are becoming arcs for many species and by keeping the genetics diverse we are guaranteeing there will always be Eastern Black and White Colobus Monkeys.

The next time you see one of our keepers here at the Zoo, know that they have worked very hard to get to "scoop poop" and everything that goes with it and if you have a question about any of the animals, they are always happy to tell you about the animals at your Niabi Zoo!



Laura next to Keeya, one of our young Colobus, at our Colobus monkey viewing window