

Major Possibilities: Animal Behavior



Summary

- A major in Animal Behavior prepares students for a variety of graduate programs, including: animal behavior, animal learning, behavioral ecology, biopsychology, ecology, neuroscience and veterinary science.
- Students interested in veterinary school are advised to obtain clinical experience and seek the BS degree in Animal Behavior.
- A genuine concern for the welfare of animals is an understood trait for someone who works with animals. However, some jobs also require physical strength and long hours of work.

Animal Behavior major synopsis

Animal Behavior is an interdisciplinary major which combines courses from the Biology and Psychology departments. Students can receive either a Bachelor of Science or a Bachelor of Arts in Animal Behavior, depending upon whether they take the biology, chemistry, and mathematics/computer science courses required for a Bachelor of Science. The major requires a minimum of seven biology courses, a minimum of six psychology courses, and two chemistry courses. In addition to these courses, students are required to conduct research under the supervision of a faculty member. This research can be conducted in the lab or can be fieldwork. The capstone project consists of conducting original research in the student's area of interest and in cooperation with one of the program's faculty advisers.

Select categories of Animal Behavior occupations

Protective Agencies

Working in an animal shelter is one way to help save animals. The shelter managers supervise daily activities within the shelter, meaning they interact with both animals and their staff members. For this job, it is important to have knowledge about animals, but people skills are also a necessity so that shelter operations run smoothly. Some private shelters have an education department, with the goal of educating the public about the proper way to care for their pets and other animals. The primary audiences for humane education programs are children, so you should be willing and able to communicate on their level.

Wildlife refuge centers handle animals that are not domesticated. Positions in wildlife fields are highly competitive and obtaining a master's or doctorate degree in wildlife-related fields is encouraged. Biologists who work at wildlife refuges study the interaction between animals and their habitat and if that relationship is out of balance, they work to correct it.

Teaching and Research

The majority of Animal Behavior majors go on to receive their PhD in Animal Behavior or a DVM so they can continue their research and teach new people interested in the field. There is a lot of competition for these positions but students who obtain their PhD in programs offering broad training in one or more of the behavioral or biological sciences will be more competitive in the job market. Those who do not wish to obtain a PhD or DVM could be a research assistant if they have a BS or MS degree. They work under the direction of faculty or staff researchers and help to design, perform and analyze the results of animal behavior studies.

Training

Some behaviorists train animals for public performance for zoos, circuses, stage, or television; others train pets as in obedience training, guard dog training, seeing-eye dogs, or retrieving. Currently, in most states and provinces, animal trainers are not required to have any specialized training in animal behavior. However, many have been through a certification training program or have apprenticed to another professional animal trainer.

Veterinary Medicine

Approximately three-fourths of veterinarians work in private practices and 70% of those treat small animals, otherwise known as companion animals. About one-fourth of all veterinarians work in mixed animal practices, where they see pigs, goats, cattle, sheep, and some wild animals in addition to companion animals. A very small percentage of private practice veterinarians exclusively treat large animals. Veterinarians who do not work in private practices often do research or are on staff at places like zoos. Prospective veterinarians must graduate with a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (DVM or VMD) degree from a four-year program at an accredited college of veterinary medicine and obtain a state license.

Sample job titles

Arts, Media & Entertainment

Curator
Pet Portraitist
Trainer
Wildlife Photographer
Zoo Director
Zookeeper

Industry and Commerce

Clerical Worker
Groomer
Kennel Worker
Pet Sales and Service
Pet Sitter/Walker
Therapist

Research

Animal Reintroduction Program Coordinator
Animal Reproduction Research
Aquarium Director
Ornithologist
Pet Transporter
Research/Wildlife Biologist

Service and Education

Animal Control Officer
Humane Educator/Investigator
Protective Agencies
Refuge/Shelter Manager
Trainer
Veterinary Medicine Doctor/Tech

Potential internship sites

Animal Hospital of Georgetown
Austin Humane Society
Austin SPCA
Austin Zoo
Dog trainers
Humane Society of Williamson County
Sea World San Antonio
Texas Parks and Wildlife
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services
Walt Disney World – Living Seas program

Sample full-time employers of SU grads

Mission Integration Specialist - Wyle Laboratories
Pet Store Manager - Herpeton Exotic Pets
Primate Keeper - Busch Gardens
Research Assistant - UT MD Anderson Cancer Center
Research Assistant – UT Southwestern
Receptionist -Town and Country Animal Hospital
Veterinary Technician - San Gabriel Animal Hospital

Professional organizations

American Association of Zookeepers: www.aazk.org
American Society for Animal Science: www.asas.org
Animal Behavior Society: www.animalbehavior.org
Association for Psychological Science: www.psychologicalscience.org
Association of Zoos and Aquariums: <http://www.aza.org/>
International Society for Applied Ethology: www.applied-ethology.org
International Society for Comparative Psychology: www.comparativepsychology.org
National Council for Science and the Environment: ncseonline.org
Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology: www.sicb.org

Other Web Resources

Guide Dogs of America: <http://www.guidedogsofamerica.org/index.html>
Indiana University's Center for the Integrative Study of Animal Behavior: <http://www.indiana.edu/~animal/help/careers.html>
Research Experiences for Undergraduates: http://www.nsf.gov/crssprgm/reu/reu_search.cfm

Career Services' print resources

Best 162 Medical Schools
Careers for Animal Lovers and Other Zoological Types
Graduate Research: A Guide for Students in Science
How to Get into the Right Medical School
Opportunities in Animal and Pet Care Careers
Opportunities in Veterinary Medicine Careers
Pharmaceutical/Medical Representatives: A Mission for Success