

## **Marine Mammal Trainer**

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### **What do you do?**

I train marine mammals for physiology research. This includes training sea otters to do things that allow us to collect research with them cooperatively. Some of these behaviors include diving, participating in their medical care by allowing us to do medical examinations on them, and getting in a kennel for transport, just to name a few. I also supervise volunteers that assist in the daily care of the sea otters. This means that we have to prepare daily feeds for them and keep their water and living areas clean and free from things that can harm them.

### **What education and skills do you need?**

I have a bachelor's degree in biology.

It is important to be able to write papers and give presentations about the work we are doing so that we can talk about what we are learning from working with the sea otters. It is also good to have knowledge of the areas where these animals live and know a little bit about their physiology.

### **What personal skills are needed for your job?**

Since we work together as a team, it is very important to be able to work well with others and have good communication skills. It is also important to have a lot of patience when it comes to training animals. Of course being an animal person is very important as well!

### **What do you enjoy the most about your job?**

The part of my job I enjoy the most is being able to watch the animals as they learn and being able to interact with them on a daily basis.

### **What do you like least about your job?**

The part of my job I like the least is that sometimes I have to say good-bye to animals when they either go to another facility or when they get old and die.

### **Tell us a funny sea otter story.**

All of our sea otters have different personalities and do things that make me laugh. One of them is especially interested in people and likes to interact with people more than he does with other sea otters. When he was living in the wild, he kept trying to climb into areas where he knew people were because he liked being able to get food from them instead of having to look for it himself. That's why

we have him now. If he had to live in the wild, he wouldn't have made it because he wasn't good at finding his own food.

**Tell us a personally rewarding sea otter story.**

It's very rewarding to train animals new things and watch them finally catch on to a behavior that they have been learning for a long time. It was very rewarding to me to get sea otters to learn to dive underwater and stay there for up to 3 minutes until they are given a signal that tells them to return to the surface for food.

**How did you decide to work with sea otters?**

I work in a marine lab where we work with whatever animals the lead scientist decides they want to study. Although it wasn't my initial choice to work with these animals, I am so glad I was given the opportunity to train them.

**Why is your job important?**

My job is important so that we can learn more about marine mammals and try to figure out how to make a better life for all their relatives that live in the ocean.

**What can someone do now if they are interested in your profession or to get involved?**

The best thing they can do if they want to get into research with marine mammals is to study hard and go to college. Volunteering is always a good way to get involved with working with trained marine mammals, although you usually have to wait until you are 18 to volunteer.

**Do you have any favorite web links that kids can visit to learn more?**

International Marine Animal Trainers' Association

<http://www.imata.org/>

American Zoo and Aquarium Association

<http://www.aza.org/>