

-- Speaker 1 00:00:11 Hey, everyone. Welcome back to rewild ology, where we explore conservation, sustainability, travel and leave it all out on the table. First off, I want to thank you all for a killer launch. I cannot believe the amount of positive feedback I received, and I'm so grateful for every single one of you. So cheers, this toast is for you. All. It was bubbly is so good that even have debt. It's still tastes delicious. Anyways, let's get to today's show. So in this episode, I am chatting with Johnny pain and she is completely revolutionizing the face of conservation. We explore her journey of her deciding to change her major last minute in college, to become a full-time zookeeper. She lays out a complete blueprint for anybody who wants to also go into this field. So I highly recommend get out a piece of paper pen, take out any notes and follow some of her advice because it is fantastic.

Speaker 1 00:01:17 We also dive deep into what it's like for her to be a black zookeeper and a mostly dominant white field. This is such great content, and I think that anybody should listen to this and let's do exactly what she says. And if you happen to be in charge of hiring or an executive at a conservation organization, I highly recommend you also take notes so we can keep, keep revolutionizing the face of conservation. So I'm going to stop jabbering here and let's get to today's show with Johnny. Awesome. Well, thanks Donnie. I'm so excited to have you on today. You're just incredible person and Kate let's get into your story. So I thought a really good place to start might be how our lives crossed. Um, it was what back in 2015, I think, and I had just moved to Texas and our mutual friend Allen, um, made sure that we got to know each other, which is, I'm so grateful for him.

Speaker 1 00:02:21 That was really great because we both worked at the Columbus zoo. He knew I was coming down here to work at the Dallas zoo. And you were at the Fort worth too at the time. And you got us in, we had such a fun time and even got to see you do one of your keeper talks, which was awesome. We had a great day. Um, and, but clearly that's not where your story starts, so right. Where did your zookeeping start kind of what was stage number one and your as you're keeping career? Yeah, first of all, all of that seems like forever ago, which it was five years ago, but it seems so much longer. Um, but I

Speaker 2 00:03:00 Feel like I got a late start. Um, then a lot of other people in the zookeeping field, um, I wasn't like old or anything. Um, just, I think later, like a lot of times I think all of us, or a lot of us want to be like a vet when we're kids. Um, so I kind of wanted to do that, but then I was like, nevermind, I don't want to do that. That's a lot of school, very expensive, although you'd make more money being a vet. Um, but I kinda like went off course in a way from animals, um, through college. And then I actually went to the zoo to the Columbus zoo, um, the summer before my senior year of college and saw one of the animal shows and talked to one of the girls there. And she was saying that, um, you know, they all went to school for zoology and education and things like that. So I went to talk to an advisor and I changed my major and then took a course at the zoo called zoo science and management. And that was when I decided I want to be wanted to be a zookeeper. Um, cause I didn't know it was a career choice until then, honestly, I don't know why. I think that happens to a lot of us. We just don't know that it's even an option. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:04:16 Um, so I knew that I just needed to get my foot into the door. So I started taking any jobs that I could at the Columbus zoo. So I actually started in the admissions department and then eventually switched into the education department and did an internship with them. Um, and then my last year in education, I was able to work with animal ambassadors, which are the shows, not the shows, which are the animals that are used in the shows that I saw that kind of got me interested in this field in the first place. Um, and so I wasn't taking care of them. I just was doing education programs and was able to utilize some of the animals, which was awesome. And then my last year there and this, these were all seasonal positions. I finally got a seasonal job doing those shows that I saw, um, which was awesome.

Speaker 2 00:05:06 And so I was ther --

-- e in that department for one season and then I knew that I was probably going to have to leave, um, because the Columbus zoo is such a huge deal and so amazing that they don't have a lot of turnover. Um, and a lot of people will have to leave to go get their full time experience. So that was the year 2015. Um, that March was when I got the job in Texas at Fort worth and I moved there and then it wasn't that long that, um, yeah, that I think you had contacted me because of Allen and Allen. And I actually went to school together at Ohio state and then, um, worked at the Columbus at the same time, but I don't think we were ever in the same department at the same time, but yeah, so that was a lot of fun.

Speaker 3 00:05:52 Well, I did it. I didn't realize that you moved in 2015 as well. That's so fun.

Speaker 1 00:05:58 It's just like, you've already established here and I'm the newbie on the block cause I went in July, so yeah. That's that's so serendipitous. That's awesome. So then what did you end up studying? Did you have to change your complete, like educational background or what did you end up doing for your degree? So

Speaker 4 00:06:17 That kind of being okay. Like a lot of my prereq classes, I guess, kind of lined up because I was going to school initially when I went to school, I was going for pre-physical therapy. So it was very science related backgrounds. Um, but then I kind of, it was something that interested me, but not something I was passionate about at all. Um, and honestly it was just something like, well, this is kind of cool and I'll make money doing it, which is what most of us all do when we go to school, like what's gonna make me money and what do I like doing? Um, so I was doing that and then I was like, I don't like this. So I actually changed my major and I started studying like, I think sociology, um, and then was going to minor in criminology. Cause that was also something that was super interesting and interested me.

Speaker 4 00:07:12 But, um, it was, I only did that for a year. And then that was when I went to the zoo right before my senior year started. And when I was talking to my advisor, we were going over options. Um, and one of the girls at the zoo actually told me to, I was going to Ohio state. Um, she said, don't take zoology there. Cause it's just, uh, I don't know, it's a very big college and some of the professors, they're just kinda, they're there for research, which is awesome. And they don't make the best professors or don't explain things the best, which I experienced a lot in my chemistry classes. Chemistry is like, Whoa, I'm horrible at it. And it's not something that interests me in the slightest bit. Um, so it was my most difficult courses and a lot of those professors, that's what they're into, but sometimes they're not the best at explaining it to people like me who just don't understand what's happening, um, when it comes to anything remotely like that.

Speaker 4 00:08:11 Um, so I had already taken some chem courses, um, and knew that I was horrible at it. So when I sat down with my advisor, we kind of were going over all of the majors and minors and we were looking at the, um, was it the school of environment and natural resources and all of the majors within there? Um, cause one of the girls had told me that a lot of them went to school for environmental sciences and things like that. Um, or education, like I said, because working with animal ambassadors, it's a lot of, uh, you need that science background, but also you're educating people. So having an educational background is just as important, um, as it is to be a zoology or a biology major. But I ended up

Speaker 2 00:08:56 Studying, I think they, they changed the name of the major now. Um, but it was like parks rec and tourism was my major and it was along the lines of, um, environmental sciences and wildlife biology. And so I had to take a lot of those courses and conservation courses and understanding ecosystems, um, and you know, and they have like a lot of people that I work with, um, or have met through this career, um, went to school for animal biology or animal behavior and things like that. So there's a lot of different options. I actually get messages almost every single day on my Instagram asking me like, what's the best course. Um, and I tell them, pick something that can be science-related, but do what you want to pick something that's interesting t --

-- o you. Um, you don't have to just take zoology. You don't just have to do, you just don't have to do the animal behavior you can do. There are so many options out there. Um, but yeah, so I went to school for a lot of environmental related things, which was nice. Cause we did study a lot of, um, like zoo sciences and, and things like that. That's awesome. It was a long explanation.

Speaker 1 00:10:16 No, that's really good. And that's really good. Cause like I did go the more the traditional route. So I went, when I was at Ohio state, I did do zoology and prevent. Okay. So, and I do agree. I don't know why I took two and a half years of chemistry. Why did I need to take two and a half years of chemistry? I still to this day, do not freaking understand why that happened. Um, but know exactly on that same line and, and retrospect, um, because I did go on to get another degree, but while I'm so grateful for my education there, I do think that maybe for what I ended up doing a different degree might have been the better route of, but of course, when you're asked, when you're 18 years old, what do you want to do? Make your life decision now it's right.

Speaker 1 00:11:03 It's like, what do you mean I'm going to go? How many thousands of dollars in debt on a decision that I'm making today? 18 years old? Yes. I'm really glad that you bring that up because, um, even when I was a zookeeper as well, I feel like we all had a different pathways that took us there. We all had to have a degree of some sort that's pretty standard across the board, but what that degree was was pretty, it was pretty mixed. So I'm, I'm really grateful that you just brought that up and a lot of people ask you that.

Speaker 2 00:11:34 Yeah. Like, especially recently, I've had a very large influx and followers on Instagram. So I constantly have messages in my request folder and they mostly are those questions. Like how do I become a zookeeper I'm in high school and I'm like interested in it and I'm looking into colleges right now and majors, what should I major in? Um, so it's nice. So a lot of times like I have to kinda type something up. I don't know why I haven't saved it. I'll type it up and then basically kind of paste it into everyone's thing and then I'll like adjust it and personalize it and things like that. Cause a lot of the times I'm just saying the exact same thing, like try to do something science related, but go off what you're interested in. Um, and the thing that I forgot to mention that the whole chemistry thing, um, in the school of environment, natural resources, there were several majors.

Speaker 2 00:12:32 And so I also sat down because I knew that I did not do well in chemistry and I was going to still have to take more chem classes. Um, I looked at what the requirements were in the classes that I was going to have to take. So I actually picked one of my majors off of the more difficult science classes. So for instance, the major that I picked, I just needed the lower level chemistry classes, which I think at the time I had only taken one. So I needed to take another one. Um, and then higher level biology courses, which I was better at biology, but I also enjoy it more. Um, so I definitely also recommend that if you're looking at majors and if you're applying to school and you haven't started yet, I guess, um, look at the classes that are offered and see what also interests you specifically in the courses that you're going to have to take. Um, when you do choose that major or course of study.

Speaker 1 00:13:34 No, that's really great. And also having been on the other side of doing hiring and my day, and also applying to a million jobs in the field, people don't really care what your degree was in just as that's somewhat relevant. It's more about the resume and what type of work you've done in the past. So just throwing that out there as well from personal experience, it's what have you done? Oh yeah. Is what was your degree specifically in, so that was a little life piece of advice that I wish that was thrown at me when I was 18 as well. But exactly. So tell me more about, so the transition into zookeeping itself, cause that's kind of like just doing education to taking care of animals. I mean, that's a pretty big leap. So how were you able to wedge your way into more of that side of the zoo field?

Speaker 2 00:14:31 Yeah, so, um, first of all, I, but again, I feel like it's a lot of --

-- us, I hate cleaning. Um, so I honestly, at the time when I had these other positions didn't know yet, if I was going to like the cleaning part of the job, which is another thing that I tell a lot of younger people, like,

Speaker 4 00:14:52 You know, if you hate cleaning, that doesn't mean anything. You can still potentially like being a zookeeper and cleaning up after the animals. Um, but I always tell them before you, if you have the means to maybe try to volunteer somewhere or get in some sort of experience before you just like totally veer off into another direction. Um, and so what I did was I was doing those, um, I was working in the education department and finally it was working with animals, which in that aspect, it was like bare minimum cleaning. Like if we had to take the animal somewhere and they pooped in their crates, like there's a little tiny bit of taste of what you deal with on a regular basis, um, being a zookeeper, but then thankfully the Ohio wildlife center is literally right around the corner from the zoo. And so I started volunteering there and it was, they have education volunteer opportunities, but I chose to do, um, the animal care volunteer opportunity to get some of that experience to help me get another job, um, within Columbus, which it helped, um, to get me that, um, basically animal programs, job, where I was also taking care of the animals and cleaning up after them.

Speaker 4 00:16:08 Um, but also it gave me the experience of cleaning up after a while the animals to see if I enjoyed it. Um, and I didn't hate it. So I was like, okay, like let's just keep going and see how it goes. Um, so then that next year I got that job and it was seasonal working with the animal ambassadors at the Columbus. Um, and it was a lot of cleaning. Um, and it was very different. There were there three different buildings at the time, at least where a lot of the animals lived. Um, so one of the buildings there basically was like, no hosing, which is like, what you generally do is a zookeeper or that you think of, um, especially when you take care of large animals. And so there was that, which is like, it's a little bit different. I feel like it's a little bit more, it's not super physical, but like it was a little bit more labor intensive, I guess, because you were constantly on your hands and knees, like picking up newspaper, what a kind of, whatever kind of paper was laid down for the animals.

Speaker 4 00:17:09 Um, and then there was another building where it was, um, hosing things and you have to shift the animals and you have to learn how to create some of the animals. Um, so it was definitely completely different. Um, and it was a learning experience too, because I did get the opportunity to learn the different things in different ways of cleaning and being a zookeeper. Um, but again, animal ambassadors, so all small Lish animals and smaller animals. Um, but yeah, I mean, and you also have to get up a lot earlier, so it was a bit of a transition cause you have to get up and be at the zoo several hours before the zoo opens because you need the cleanup after

Speaker 2 00:17:50 The animals and get them ready for when the zoo opens. Um, and you sweat a lot more. I mean, like in the summertime, no matter what you do, you're going to be splitting outside. Um, but when you're a keeper you're inside sweating and then you go outside into the summer heat and you're still sweating. Um, and I hate the summer time. Yeah. And you stink. So that was definitely like a big transition, um, cause then education, like, okay, maybe you get there a little bit before the zoo opens and you still work with the animals, but you only smell if like they pee or poop on you. It's not your own smell. Um, so yeah, that was a little bit of a transition and learning how to be, um, productive when you clean the like make sure that you AE you're cleaning it well enough, but also you have to, it's still practice.

Speaker 2 00:18:40 You gotta practice to get quicker, um, to be able to go through and get everything done by the time that you have to do a program or by the time that the zoo opens. Um, but also making sure that you're not skipping out on things, um, and also staying safe because you're working with animals. Um, so this is very interesting. And then so thankfully that prepared me a lot for them when I finally went to Fort worth. Um, and I still learned a lot, um, and kind of helped me --

-- help me get through things quicker and learn things and, and yeah, I don't, I don't really know what else to say about it, but it was definitely kind of a, uh, not a difficult transition, but I mean, it wasn't super easy, was a lot of learning behind it.

Speaker 1 00:19:32 No, that's great. Thank you. So how long did it take you from the moment you decided that you wanted to be a full-time zookeeper? Like this is my, this is what I want to do. How long was it until you landed your first full-time zookeeping job?

Speaker 2 00:19:51 Okay. That's a good question. I think so I decided that I wanted to be used to keep her when I took that, um, zoo science and management class that was at Columbus and that was my junior year of college, which so when I changed my major only added two years of schooling, um, I'm pretty sure it was like 2010 was the year that I had decided. Um, and then 2015 was my first full time keeper job. So it took five, five years for me to get my full time job. Um, and that is normal for some people, it takes five years. Some people take a lot longer than that. Um, but sometimes you can get lucky and it doesn't take that long. Um, which is why it's really important to start if you know, what you want to do, get your early, which again, I think, like I said before, um, I got kind of a late start if I knew what I wanted to do before my senior year of college, um, it may not have taken me five years or so after.

Speaker 2 00:21:03 Um, cause it was several years after I graduated. I graduated in 2012. So after graduating, it was still another three years before I got that full-time job. Um, which I feel like is pretty sure after graduation. Um, but I mean, if you're in high school, if you're a senior right now, if you're a freshmen in college right now and you start volunteering either at a zoo or at a wildlife sanctuary or something, which always do your background checks, um, and kind of like scope out the reputation of the zoo or sanctuary or wildlife center that you want to volunteer or work at. Um, cause I mean you always want to make sure that they have the animals, this interest at hearts. Um, and sometimes people don't necessarily know to look into that kind of stuff and then might get their experience and then sometimes have a hard time getting into a place like an AZA accredited zoo.

Speaker 2 00:22:01 Um, and AZA definitely, always lists that they prefer you have experience in another accredited zoo. Um, but I mean, ACA is not that doesn't define a good zoo. Like there are plenty of other zoos out there that just don't have the money or the means to be accredited by ACA it's always just look into it. Um, but yeah, but if you start out early volunteering, um, getting internships and working seasonally and again, just getting your foot into the door. So like I said, I started working in the admissions department and that put me all over the zoo and I got to know a lot of people at the zoo in a lot of the zookeepers, um, which helped me, I think, um, when applying for other jobs because people knew who I was, um, or they knew that they could go to another supervisor there at the zoo, even though it's an into different in a different department and they knew or could tell them what kind of a worker I was. Um, so yeah, so it kinda took me a long time to get into full-time position. Um, but also wasn't all that long everyone's like we talked about earlier. Everyone's stories are completely different. Sometimes people get lucky in their first year out of college, they get a full-time job.

Speaker 1 00:23:18 No, thanks for that. Cause I think that that's a common misconception from anyone who's not in the field of understanding how long it takes to actually land one of these jobs. It gets there's very low turnover. There's only so many zookeeping positions. Um, most sues are nonprofits. Um, and so there is, there is a budget that they have to work within. And so to land, those does take a long time. And I, I, that's why I really wanted to go down that path to show people that like, if you want to go and be a zookeeper by golly, do it. Yeah. Like get ready for the emotional roller coaster. Cause it's probably going to take a long time to land your first full-time job and to be financially ready for that as well. It might, it might take a while. I mean, we're known as we're known as being poor people, which yes.

Speaker 1 00:24:12 When you can only get so --

-- seasonal jobs. Well, you know, and I'm also really glad that you mentioned, um, just getting your foot in the door because zoos, from my experience, there are very close knit families. So even though you work in a completely different position or like, you know, different department of the zoo, they're always going to be more inclined to hire within because they can go to your supervisor. You do have somebody that they trust to give you a good word or not. So also do a really good job to not be a Dick at work.

Speaker 2 00:24:47 Right. That's going to get out, right. No matter what you do, whether it's food services or you're working in facilities, like, yes, it's a very close knit community. Like you said, um, it's very competitive and everyone knows everyone because everyone has done, they've traveled for internships. They've traveled for volunteer opportunities. You have to move halfway across the country sometimes for a keeper job. Um, so all of us knows at least someone in some zoo or has a friend that works at currently with you at the zoo that knows several other people in other zoos. Um, so everyone knows everyone. So don't burn bridges either because then you're going to get stuck. Um, and you're going to have a very hard time either going to maybe if you have a dream zoo or anything like that, um, if you do burn bridges, so yeah. Treat everyone like they're your best friends. That's a really big advice. Yes,

Speaker 1 00:25:48 No. Yeah. When life is going to be full circle, if that one friends cause like our mutual friend that you happen to go to college with that I worked with at the zoo happen to know both of us and happened to put us together. Like that's just one example of just how, how short the threads are between everybody in this field, which is great. Just as long as you play your cards. Right. And you treat everybody well, then you're fine. But if you're not, then just be careful.

Speaker 2 00:26:18 Yes, yes. For sure. Because again, everyone knows, someone knows somebody, someone knows somebody seven, seven, seven, what is it? Seven degrees to like Kevin Bacon or something. What was that? Let's say people who are like, who's kind of Bacon. I feel like if you get younger listeners just look him up, you'll recognize them, just look them up.

Speaker 1 00:26:46 Um, no, that's great. So one of the things that I really wanted an opportunity to talk about with you, especially since you're on more, the zoo education side, zoos are commonly misunderstood and what their roles are in conservation and wildlife. And I would love if you just took a second to really dive into what the common misconceptions are that you hear a lot of the time and what the right information is and what zoos, where their role is in the grand scheme of saving wildlife.

Speaker 2 00:27:20 Yeah. So I feel like no matter what, like animals are something that make people feel a lot. Um, so people are always going to have very, very strong emotions about animals. Um, and so a lot of times people just don't understand zoos at all. Or they think that zoos are making a profits off of these animals. If that were the case, then none of us would be poor. Um, but we are because a lot of these are nonprofits. Um, and even Z's that are not nonprofits still are responsible for sending millions of dollars to conservation efforts all over the world. And that includes locally, like animals that you wouldn't even think of that live in your backyard, um, or the big animals that you think of like gorillas or elephants and things like that. Um, and so zoos do have a bad path. Like what, some people that don't know anything about zoos, the things that they do know are very old histories of zoos.

Speaker 2 00:28:22 Like people think that views go out and just take animals out of the wild, um, which there are people that still do that, unfortunately. Um, but that's what zoos used to be a very long time ago. Um, but what they are now is basically like I have heard it be called, it's almost like an arc. There are a lot of animals that no longer unfortunately exist in the wild. Um, but they exist in zoos still. And a lot of animals that are still alive today are it's, the zoos are responsible for it. Um, for instance, bald Eagles, we all know the story of a bald Eagle. Um, but I think a lot of people don't realize is that, you know, bald Eagles and zoos are ones that can't be released, um, for whatever reason, --

-- whether they're injured or I think one that lives at Columbus like attacked someone one time.
Speaker 2 00:29:16 So they, the park service deemed it unreleasable. And so it lives there. Um, but for years, zoos would breed bald Eagles in captivity and place eggs out in a wild bald Eagle nest. And that was what got their numbers up. Um, so that's just one thing that isn't even really like a huge thing to do. Um, the completely changed the number and pulled bald Eagle off of the injured species list. Um, and so the other nice thing is when you go to a zoo, especially at least in AZA accredited zoo, as part of your proceeds goes to conservation. So just going to a zoo like the Columbus zoo, since we've been talking about that one a lot, um, or the Denver zoo where you are, um, or the national zoo where I am currently, um, part of the proceeds that you're paying just to get into the zoo, um, obviously is going to the zoo and taking care of the animals that live there.

Speaker 2 00:30:15 Um, but part of it's going somewhere else to take care of animals in the wild. Um, and again, that's the main purpose of zoos is to educate you or, um, the general public about the animals that exist in the world. There are so many animals that I specifically work with, um, that our animal ambassadors that people have never heard of before. They've never seen them before. They're completely shocked that this animal is a real life animal. Um, and I mean, just seeing something, especially in person is completely different to people like it makes such a huge impact on them. Um, and then our goal is to educate you that they exist. Um, and the plights of that animal, what they're experiencing in the wild and hopes that you might make decisions like recycling or something simple, or turning your light out, or that you might take an interest to where if you have the means to travel, maybe you can go travel and help support, um, you know, ecotourism, that's going to protect those animals habitats.

Speaker 2 00:31:22 Um, or you might have the means like, let me donate \$5 or \$10,000. If I have it to conservation efforts to save the copy in the Congo or mountain gorillas that are critically endangered. Um, and things like that. Cause a lot of, I, yeah, I feel like some of the animals that I've mentioned, people that are potentially listening to this and don't know a lot about animals are not in the animal field. They're like, what the heck is no copy mountain gorillas. What's that like just hearing about them sometimes sparks and interests. Um, and that's what the zoo is behind the zoos are behind saving those animals in the wild and their habitats, which a lot of people don't realize, um, again, millions of dollars, the zoo will send that do not come to the animals at the zoo or us, um, to not only save that animal, but the best way to save them as protecting that habitat.

Speaker 2 00:32:21 And a lot of times it's just to strictly even educate the people that live around that animal. Um, and sometimes giving them a means to rather than, um, collect eggs, turtle, eggs, um, they're just that's livelihood, um, or people that will poach animals, um, whether it's for food or their livelihood, um, zoos can educate those people on why it's important to keep those animals, um, safe, but they also give them the means a lot of times to, um, do something else to make money and said, I don't know how to explain it. I'm not wording it. Well, an example is, um, some zoos will go out and they'll educate people that maybe are going and collecting turtle eggs and they'll have them. Why don't you go out and collect feed glass or see trash instead, make your jewelry that you're making anyways. And then the zoo will buy all of it and then sell it in a zoo gift shop. Um, so then instead of making their money off of sea turtle eggs, they can go out and help clean the beaches up, but then also make money off of it. Um, I feel like I didn't quite answer your question, but, um, but yeah, I feel like, but it, it kinda does. I guess a lot of people think that zoos are just there to make money when they're not, we're there to educate and do so much other stuff that people have no idea that zoos are responsible for.

Speaker 1 00:33:53 No, that's great. No, that's a, no, that was a really good answer. You totally answered it all over the place. Yeah, no, it's good that we go all over the place on this show. It's fine. Very anywhere you wa --

-- nt to go, we'll go down the rabbit hole together. It's fine. So also on that note, I think that it's, um, places that people can go or that they see online or they see in headlines, you know, like the recent like tiger King and shit like that. So it gives a lot of the really good places, a bad rep because there are some places around, you know, States around the U S that their laws are way lot more lax. And you can have animals that you should not have that only highly trained zookeepers are allowed to take care of after years and years of experience. And some people have them in their backyards. So there is this obvious disconnect and people's minds of what a zoo is and conservation, and then like animal rights and animal livelihood and everything like that. So let's say that somebody is on vacation somewhere and they see that there is a zoo or an animal sanctuary of some sort that is in the area to go to what are some tips or tricks that people should look for to ensure that that is a reputable place that they should go support.

Speaker 2 00:35:14 Yeah. So I probably don't know like all the tips and tricks that a lot of other people would know. Um, but one of the things that I like to do, and especially I have more of a connection than non animal care people have. Um, and a lot of us will do it. So if you are a keeper we're in the zoo field, um, reach to other people

Speaker 4 00:35:38 To see what it is like, um, to see what the reputation of that zoo or sanctuary is. Um, I'm sure. And I like, I don't, I don't really know like any specific websites that you could look at, but I would at least even just Google it, like reputation of whatever it is to kind of see if you see anything negative or bad. Um, but if you, especially, if you travel like out of country, like, um, I had someone that I knew went highly vanilla country. They were in, but, um, it was like a place that has like a marketplace where you see like monkeys in cages that you can buy, whether it's for pets or food. Um, and they got this picture with a tiger that had its canines remove. Um, if you see that at a zoo or someplace, um, that's not a rescue animal that like maybe it was a previous owner and that owner had its teeth removed.

Speaker 4 00:36:33 And that's the reason that it has it removed at the zoo. Um, if they do that for like guests safety of any sort, or like come play with this Capuchin that has no canines, like for your safety, don't go someplace like that. Those animals need those teeth. And there's absolutely no reason that they need them removed. Um, but again, like a lot of times some zoos, even big zoos will have animals that were previously owned and like confiscated animals. Um, the, uh, black bear that used to work or not work at fair that used to be at Columbus a long time ago was a confiscated animal, um, from someone at, and it had been declawed, which is horrible. Um, so it had horrible arthritis and had issues with its paws and walking for a very long time before it even, um, was very old. So those are like the big noticeable things to watch out for.

Speaker 4 00:37:29 Um, if they've removed anything from the animal for someone's safety, don't go there. Um, but yeah, and then if you know, someone who is a zookeeper and animal care staff that you trust, um, or maybe works at like a good zoo and you know, that they work there, um, ask them to see what they think about it. Um, and what they've, they've heard. So they're still like, um, we have a group on, uh, Facebook, that's a private group just for zookeepers or sometimes previous zookeepers. And a lot of times we'll see posts on there, like, Hey, I'm in this state or this country or whatever. And I really would like to go here, what is everyone's opinions and what do you know about it? Um, cause a lot of times you'll have people like, well, actually that was my first experience was there, but like, don't go there cause they're terrible or something like that. But definitely I don't have any other really like tips that I know of. I personally would just have to go to my friends and, and uh, colleagues to see if they have had any bad experiences or know of anyone that knows anything about that facility.

Speaker 1 00:38:41 Yeah. Completely agreed. I think the big takeaway there is just do your homework, do your research, make sure that whatever is on the website aligns with whatever you believe in like me, you know, big cats are my thing. I --

-- f they advertise Cub petting in any way, shape or form avoid it. Like the plague. Yeah. That's pretty much my number one rule. Like, don't go, I can't say that enough. Um, plus like, you know, tiger King and like that was got a lot of questions after that show, which I'm glad if anything good came out of that show. It was that people started asking questions. Like I got questions from people that had never even thought that this was a thing or that it's just, yeah. Great questions. So glad that they could come too. I'm sure you got lots of questions as well. Just coming to the dentist. I was weird. I was very weirdly like the perfect person to come to and ask. Yeah,

Speaker 4 00:39:41 I know. Yeah. So that's like, one thing is like I work with animal ambassador, so I always definitely explained cause you'll, I'll get a lot of comments or when we're out in the zoo with our animals, I'm like, Oh, I really want one. Like, they're super cute and awesome, but they're still wild animals. Um, and they are not our pets. They do not go home with us at night. Um, they still are dangerous. We just have been with them and um, work with them. And it's our job, um, to build a relationship with them. We're like a lot of animals that we have. Like if you tried to do that with one, that's an exhibit animal, it's gonna say, no, thank you. And you're going to have to, you don't want it anywhere near it. Um, so that one that's I some, because I do have, I do work with animals like that, that are animal ambassadors. I'm shocked that no one really came to me and asked about the tiger King, but it was, it was pretty crazy.

Speaker 1 00:40:37 Yeah. And I really, wow. Yeah. I'm really surprised as well. People, you have a great resource. If you have any questions Johnny, about this stuff, she knows all of it. Um, no, that's great. The kind of transition next. So before we, before we started talking, I, I mentioned another zookeeper that I had had on recently. Um, his name is Dave Johnson and he's a rhino keeper and it seems like in part of his life path, he went beyond his call of duty of being just as new keeper and started a nonprofit to really do some conservation work on the ground. I see some big parallels with what you're doing just with kind of like our generation version of that. And you are so involved on social media, like you have your own YouTube channel. Like you're very, very social on, on social media. What made you decide to take that route to go beyond just what you do at work to really engage more of a global community in what you do? Yeah. Um, so I need to start,

Speaker 2 00:41:48 So one thing that I haven't really liked posted about or said anything as I actually started grad school. Um, so I haven't been posting on my YouTube account as much, but I need I'm in between semesters right now. So I want to start posting again and getting back into the habits, um, and answering that first question that I said that I recently am getting a lot of and I want to do a video on my path to becoming a zookeeper. Um, but, um, how what'd you say his name was Dave? Yeah. His name is Jason. Yeah. So, okay. Yeah. He's like, he's basically like a minority, um, in his field or whatever. I don't know how to explain it. Um, but he, like, he stepped out and did all of these amazing things. Like I could only dream of starting a nonprofit. Um, I feel like I just don't have the mental capacity with like all the things that are going on, um, to do something amazing like that.

Speaker 2 00:42:44 But, um, for those of you, it's a podcast. So if you don't know who I am, I am, um, a black zookeeper, which is very rare, um, to see anyone basically of color in an animal or environmental field we're out there. Um, if you go someplace like the Bronx zoo, amazing. So many people of color that our animal care staff, which is awesome. Um, most other zoos that you go to, there's going to be zero or there might be like one or a couple. Um, I don't know. I was never full-time at Columbus, but I don't know like how many were there when I was there or how many people are there now? Um, they're pretty diverse. I think there are a couple of people of color. Um, there, when I was at Fort worth, I was the only black keeper for majority of time.

Speaker 2 00:43:36 I was there. Um, and currently at Nashville, I'm the only black keeper. Um, so using social media, especially because it is nowadays, like that's the best way kind of --

-- to get yourself out there. And it's such a huge platform, um, that I wanted to start a YouTube channel and try to have a big Instagram, um, or whatever, social media presence for people, either even my age or younger and kids that will see someone that looks like them doing something that you literally never see people that look like me doing. Um, so one of the girls who actually worked here at Nashville before I did, so she was the only black keeper at the time. Um, or actually I think maybe there were two at the time when she was here, she left right before I did her. Name's Korean and Newsome, which you should talk to. Um, I would love

Speaker 5 00:44:32 To talk to her

Speaker 2 00:44:35 And I'll, I'll text her and say, Hey, you should talk to my friend, Brooke. Um, but she, yeah, she was in the department that I'm in, um, doing the behavioral husbandry and doing the shows is what she did. Um, she left to go to grad school and she's studying birds. She's a big birder or a bird nerd. Um, and her and she's black. And so she used that while she was at Nashville too. And she started this program to try to reach out to underserved youth, um, and going into inner city schools that are predominantly black to try to a show, people that look like us, that like you can be a zookeeper, you can work in this type of field, the environment or outdoors. Um, it's not just for the people that we normally see, um, that are not of color. Um, so she started a program there at the zoo where, um, kids are reached out to, and they can actually come to the zoo and follow, um, one of the keepers for a day and they get to go meet other keepers and things like that.

Speaker 2 00:45:38 Um, and then, yeah, so she left for grad school and she did the same thing. She wanted to have this large social media presence so that people and kids that look like her could see her doing the things that she's doing. And she absolutely blew up on social media. Um, and she's been, um, recognized by different, I can't even think of anything like magazines and different organizations. Um, right now she's currently trying to get on Sesame street to educate, um, yeah, like the Sesame street, um, crowd about birds. That's amazing. Yeah. So she, like, she put a tweet out, I think yesterday. And so hundreds of people are sharing her tweet and tagging Sesame street and PBS and PBS kids to try to get her on Sesame street to educate the masses about why, how birds are so amazing. And, um, Sesame street is so amazing about being so inclusive. Um, the, like I think if they even see her or that they're going to be like, Oh yeah, obviously she's got it.

Speaker 5 00:46:40 So that'd be a hearing on me on, yeah. Yeah.

Speaker 2 00:46:43 I think she would be like such a perfect person for you to talk to. Um, when we're done, I'll text her and be like, listen, you got to do this. Um, thank you. You're amazing. Yeah. And so, yeah, so she like is such an inspiration. She, she started her and her friend started the first, um, black birders week, um, just a few months ago. Yeah. And so it's just, and it's highlighting not only just people of color in these fields, but black people, um, and these fields that again, like no one ever sees us. Um, so, and the other interesting thing about that whole thing, it's being a woman as well, which is insane. If no one out there that's listening to, this

Speaker 4 00:47:30 Is a zookeeper, the zookeeping field is dominated by women, but watching TV and like the big shows that are amazing to watch. And, um, the people that you generally see that are zookeepers and like our zoo educators basically like Jack Hannah or, um, you know, Robert Erwin, Steve Irwin, they're all white males. Um, uh, but yeah, like it's, but the field is dominated by women. So it's crazy that usually it's only men that you see, um, as a zookeeper, if you see them, like not necessarily like average, like, Hey, come be a zookeeper type stuff, but just when you see them in media, it's always a man, but that is not what the field looks like. It looks like it's insane. Um, so yeah, so I, I definitely wanted to use my platform again, just to show people again, my age, because a lot of people are in their late twenties or thirties, or I'm sure sometimes a little bit older that, you know, they're in their career and they're like, you know what, I want to be a zookeeper.

Speaker 4 00:48:40 I want to be a zoo educator. Um, and --

-- they do try to switch in and they do switch into fields like this. Um, so yeah, I just, I just like to, I want to be that person. I want to be the girl that girls see, but I also want to see that black girl or that black boy see me and say like, Oh, you know what? I just never really thought about doing that. Cause I think we've all experienced that before. Um, there might be like a career, like right now there are way more girls playing football. It's just something that like, yeah. Football is for guys and the girls may not ever really truly think about it. Maybe it's something that interests them. Like I like watching football or playing with my friends, but then they see these girls like legit playing football. And then it's just like a light bulb goes off in their brain.

Speaker 4 00:49:32 Like, wait, like I can't like, why did I not think of this? Like I can do this as a career or whatever. Um, so yeah, so I would just like to be that person for a lot of people. Because again, those girls that I saw at the show, the animal show in Columbus, it was a, they were doing an animal show and I didn't realize that was a career, but also with a bunch of girls up on stage. And I was like, why can't I do this? I'm a girl look like Jack Hannah to do this stuff.

Speaker 1 00:50:03 No, that's great. Thank you. And thank you for bringing that up. Um, cause I mean, this is also going to be posted on YouTube, but for anyone who's listening this via audio, I love that. You just mentioned that you are a black woman in this field because I think that is so powerful. And the platform you built is incredible and everybody needs, we need more examples like that and to continue this path and it's okay if you don't want to answer or you don't want to talk about it, but I was just scrolling through your Instagram to see, you know, just kind of like your life experiences. And I saw that you did go to some of the black lives matters protest when they were going on a few months ago with all the things that have happened. And just for anyone listening, we're recording this in December of 2020. So 2020 has been a wild year and those big, those big movements have happened. Um, could you take me back to that experience and what it was like for you? What, what you felt, how powerful it was, what it meant for you being there and experiencing that?

Speaker 2 00:51:11 Yeah, it was pretty crazy. Like, I mean, obviously it's, it's nice because a lot of things, I think finally people are realizing that this isn't like new stuff. It's stuff that's always happened. Um, now it's just like being recorded, like everyone's been talking about. Um, but it was like, it was crazy. Cause when I went, I wanted to go, but I didn't, I mean, anyone should go to any of those walks and marches, like whether you're with a friend or by yourself, but I just didn't know if I wanted to go by myself. And I actually had, um, a previous zoo intern that I still talk to sometimes. And she was like, Hey, I really want to go to this. Um, and she's white and she like is still, she kinda was, I don't know she was homeschooled, which is not like nothing against her, but like she still had a lot of like life experiences.

Speaker 2 00:52:07 Like her family still went out and did a lot of things and did a lot of, um, homeschooling things outside of home, um, outside of home. Uh, but she it's nice cause she's like also very open and like will ask me a lot of questions and she really wanted to go with me. Um, so we went and that just was like nice because there are obviously a lot of black people there cause we like, we matter. Um, but I, majority of the crowd and this is downtown Nashville, we're white. And I think that thing, like a lot of people that you see, especially on social media, they're like, why are you complaining? Like type thing. And it's always like people that don't look like us, like we don't have privilege like you do. You just don't see it because you benefit from it. Um, and just the fact to see that like my generation and generations younger than us and all the generations there are older. Um, you know what I mean? Like a lot of, um, I don't want to say boomers. A lot of like the boomer generation, um, was out there and it just like a lot of people that I saw, like it surprised me and it made me feel really amazing that people like that. Like they all, they do care about me and everyone else. And, but it's also an absolutely that

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-- Speaker 4 00:53:26 In 2020 we're like marching to still basically have the same rights as other people and marching for the exact same thing that, um, people were marching for 30, 40, 50 years ago. It's just, it's crazy. But yeah, but it was, it was amazing. It was nice. I was very excited that my friends asked me to go. Um, and it just, I don't know, it's like a lot of emotions that I also, like, I have a hard time processing and also have a hard time just like talking about it too. Um, I don't know. Cause I'm also like, I don't know, like I'm open, but I'm also can be very closed off and just have a hard time explaining my emotions as well. Um, but yeah, I definitely, I guess, I don't know, like all of the feelings that I was feeling, but there were a lot of feelings when I went.

Speaker 1 00:54:14 No, that's great. Thank you. Thank you for sharing that because I'm sure it was. I mean, cause I just like read your caption on it and I was like, I want to talk to her about this cause I could just feel and, and what you wrote that you were so moved and that you were feeling so many things and just, I wanted to hear it from you. And I just think that the more it's brought to light and the more that we learn about it, um, cause even like, for example, I haven't shared this at all, but very recently my little sister, she lives alone and there was a like police raid in her apartment complex and just how absolutely scared that made me and just to realize that situations like that happen in the black community all the time. And that is like almost a normal state of being.

Speaker 1 00:55:09 And it was very moving for me cause I come from like a completely different background, like really just, um, underserved white areas and the Appalachians. So my story is like very different, but that was one of the first times where it hit me where I'm just like, I can't imagine being a sister or a mom. And just thinking how often this might happen to someone in my family. And I'm kind of just getting like a little sick just thinking about it. Cause I was like so scared about for her, even though I knew that she did nothing wrong, just the fact that she was there. And just to think how often that that's the normal story for black communities and God it's kinda making me sick, but um, I think that those kind of awakenings, the more they happen and that's why I really wanted this moment of trying to chat about this because I had that epiphany moment and more of that needs to happen.

Speaker 1 00:56:08 And the fact that you are all over social media and you're like, look at me, I'm at this beautiful black woman. I am doing all these amazing things. I'm a zookeeper. Um, you can go down this path as well. And your story just inspires me so much. And so I really wanted to bring you on to share. Um, and since zoos notoriously look or historically notoriously historically look this way, but do you think that conservation organizations or HR managers or whoever is responsible for recruiting for those roles? What more can they do to mix it up so that not everybody looks alike?

Speaker 4 00:56:53 Yeah, I think, um, I don't know. I think there's like a lot more, like if I sat down and really thought about like there's a lot more things that they'd be able to do and I'm sure plenty of people have like here's my budget. Things that like as youth could do better, um, to do that, but what some do and what they could do is invest in their community. What's a lot of zoos. Do they like they'll invest in education programs, um, for free, like in, within the community that are underserved, um, or inner city, which again is generally predominantly black or a different color, um, and different minorities. Um, but the thing that a lot of zoos, unfortunately do, which like I kind of understand because they're a nonprofit, but also it's a lot of, and this is across many fields, not just as you keeping field, a lot of internships are unpaid and that is for the privileged internships or for privileged people.

Speaker 4 00:57:54 Um, so I was luckily lucky enough that I lived just outside of Columbus, I'm from a suburb in Columbus. Um, I was able to do an internship, but also my internship was at the zoo, but it was through the, through the us fish and wildlife service maybe, or maybe through Audubon and it was paid and it was very nice. So a, I didn't have to like go across the country for an unpaid internship or for a s --

-- tipend. I was able to still live at home and go get paid decent money because it was an internship through the governments. Um, but many are not paid at all. Um, and a lot of times people have to leave their States or go halfway across the country for that unpaid internship experience, which you're only going to be able to do that. If you started out in a good place already, whether you have parents or family that can support you in that move, um, you know, and you have to have so much privilege to even get to the point where you can save up that much money to be able to do that. Um, but yeah, people that are in that are underserved youth, there's a very low chance that they will ever have the opportunity to do that, or be able to take an internship that's 10 weeks in generally almost full-time hours for no pay cause they need to be working another job. They're not, you should not be working 80 hours to be able to do

Speaker 2 00:59:22 Your unpaid internship. Um, so paid internships, first of all, um, and trying to offer a lot of internships to people that are in the community. Um, and then not only just, um, so like rather than most do, just sending out like, okay, you can get this basically an animal ambassador program or whatever, like free at your school. Um, and sometimes education staff might go, you can invest in a, something like what Nashville does, where every once in a while you get kids that can come in and kind of shadow keepers for a day or two, um, keep up with that, try to make that program way bigger, which I think would be amazing. A lot of zoos, um, at least that I can think of like Columbus and Cincinnati, both have programs where you're, I think your junior and senior year, you can actually take classes at the zoo.

Speaker 2 01:00:21 Um, and that helps a lot too, like helps get people in. And I think Cincinnati basically mostly kind of serves to like the Metro area. So a lot of those youth where the one at Columbus I think is a little bit of both like, yeah, I'm not, I don't know a whole lot about all of that stuff, but that's a big help too. Um, but spend a lot more time on sending both education staff and keeper staff out to those schools to give lessons, um, and talk about what they do. Um, and if you have a keeper that looks like me or is, you know, Latino or whatever, like if they're a minority and you have a keeper, no matter what department they're in, I think like a lot, I think that's the other thing. People sometimes they're kinda like,

Speaker 6 01:01:12 I don't like, is there something

Speaker 2 01:01:14 Wrong with like, Hey, can you go to the school? Cause a lot of the kids look like you, like, I guess some people may be upset about that, but majority of times, like people are not going to be mad at you if, um, they want someone to go to a school and say like, you know what, you can be used to keep, or you can be a zoo educator, but it's a predominantly black view go to a black keeper and say like, Hey, you know, like representation matters. And we want to show them that it's not just a bunch of people that look a certain way or a bunch of men, um, that do this. So I think if you just come at it from a good position and talk to whoever it is like, Hey, would you mind going to the school because you're Latina or Latino and this school is predominantly, um, Latino.

Speaker 2 01:02:05 So, you know what I mean? Like just those kids get to see someone that looks like them doing something that maybe they've never in their life ever thought about doing. Um, so I think that would help to like zoos and it's not just the zoo. It's like, they're very particular people that are the ones that are in charge of that. If they were just more open to that idea, we're able to realize that that's even a thing. Um, and to just come at it from a good heart and talk to people and say like, Hey, can you do this? Um, I think that would be a massive thing too. And if something would just like, I don't know, it'd be cool to have like a TV show of like people going out and finding. And again, this could be good for any career where maybe there's not very many minorities in it. Um, and just have someone that is a minority, go meet other minorities in that field. That would be a really cool show. It'd be anything. Let's go meet a black as a deeper, let's go meet an Asian, whatever, like cook. I don't know. I think that would be a lot of fun white girl, but it's mostly black --

-- people. They're like the go talk to minorities that are, I don't know, they're a minority in their workplace or not even workplace, but the field that they're in.

Speaker 1 01:03:28 That's awesome. I mean, we're attracted to those that we look alike. Like it's just natural. Like we don't tribal people. So it's like, Oh, she looks like me in a career field that I didn't even know people that looked like me were in like, yeah, heck yeah. I'm in support of that. I mean the more we never can, we might be able to get these things to become real. I mean, yeah. Let's just keep saying it out loud. Well manifest. It will make things real. I think that'd be so cool.

Speaker 2 01:03:59 Cool. Yeah. It's just the whole like representation. 100% will always matter. Awesome. Yeah. I don't, I don't want zoos or just

Speaker 1 01:04:10 Organization and the field of conservation. Like the very nature of what we're doing is, I mean, it's like protecting wildlife from all around the world and to protect wildlife, you have to protect people. And if you're talking about people from all over the world, then that we shouldn't all look alike. Exactly, exactly. It shouldn't all look alike. It's just by nature of the field. Like it shouldn't. So I want to keep like, let's keep having these conversations, like bringing it up over and over again until the right time to start really making some action.

Speaker 2 01:04:44 Um, and I mean, yeah, keep, gosh,

Speaker 1 01:04:47 Like I said, your Instagram, I was like, last time I looked on there was like 16,000 followers. I'm like, that was very like,

Speaker 2 01:04:55 This just happened today. I had 18,000. No, literally it probably week and a half ago I had 6,000

Speaker 1 01:05:03 Amazing whatever algorithm is going on right now. Keep it up. Like keep Johnny going out there. Yes, everybody follow her. Awesome. I was very shocked. I was like, Oh,

Speaker 2 01:05:16 It's still going. Oh, okay. Almost a 20,000 insane. That's awesome. I'm very thankful. Very, very thankful. That's awesome.

Speaker 1 01:05:24 That was great. So what do you think is like success for you? When do you think you will feel fulfilled and whatever that means for you?

Speaker 2 01:05:37 That's a tough question. Um, I don't, I think if I, so like right now, like I'm still very new wish to the field. Like I've been full-time for five years now. Um, and I get a lot of high school kids that again, like ask me all the time, like, how did you do this? Like, what did you go to school for? Blah, whatever. Um, I think if I would start like having those kids come back and we'll no longer kids like message me or talk to me and say like, you know, I saw you on whatever platform and I've followed, whether it be your advice or whatever else, or just like, I saw your pictures, it was awesome. Um, they follow their dreams and either a became a zookeeper or conservationist. Um, maybe they'd be able to travel and like do things for conservation themselves.

Speaker 2 01:06:34 I think if I started having people come to me and say like, you inspired me to do this, I think that makes me very, very happy. Um, and then if I were to able, which I being a zookeeper, I will never have the means to do this, but just like to be able to travel, um, and like participate in conservation myself, or be able to educate people kind of like a Jack Hannah CBRE or when type of deal, like being able to travel or Stephanie Arnie, um, travel to different locations, whether it be different zoos or seeing wild animals and educating the public about things like that, which again would be like a whole nother thing. Like, uh, Stephanie, um, RNA just like blew up and was like, amazing. Like how awesome would that be? Like, it's a woman who's up there with all the rest of the men that are educating people about animals and conservation and wildlife. Um, yeah. If I like, if I could do that, that'd be awesome too. But I don't know. I know some people remind me

Speaker 1 01:07:37 My nose would be, we wouldn't be able to make this happen sooner than you think. Like that comes from amazing. I come from conservation travel, so, Oh really? Yeah. So let's just pin that hat. Well, we'll make this happen. We'll make this time last year. Um, one of my really good friends, she invited me to be in this women at conservation documentary in Tanzania and

Speaker 2 01:08:02 It was amazing --

-- . So yeah, we'll make this happen. So let's just, just

Speaker 1 01:08:07 Boyle on that for a while, let esteem in the back of your brain and let's reconvene and see if we can make that happen. We'll make that a success. Well, we'll make that a success. I was put that in like your five-year game plan, like send Johnny around the world and record it and how awesome it will be.

Speaker 2 01:08:23 Yes, we'll do that. That was amazing. One of the things that's like I'm super excited about and hopefully, obviously COVID has read everything. So I don't know how if this summer will work out, but, so I said, I went, I started grad school. Um, I'm doing, I'm going through Miami university in Ohio and it's all online. It's through project dragon fly. I graduated from there. Okay. Did you do the global field? Did you do? Okay. Okay. So that's the one that I'm doing. Um, and so this, so usually you have to like start in your summer semester. Um, but due to COVID, they allowed people to start this fall, which is what I did. Um, so I think next year I have to skip a spring semester to graduate with everyone that started this summer. Um, and so, yeah, so like potentially this upcoming summer of 2021, I'll get to go. I'm hoping the Baja, that's the one I did.

Speaker 1 01:09:25 You get all the tips? See any whale sharks? Oh yeah. First time snorkeling ever. So I either, okay. I never struggled in my life and because again, I'm from Appalachian, you know, area. So that's, that's the reason why I started the GFPs because I wanted to start international travel and I'm like, well, I will never be able to afford to do this myself. So I guess it's just go to school for it. And so I did, I did, yeah. I went to Baja, um, really fun Corrine, actually someone that has been on this show, um, she used to be a, um, like instructor or professor for that program as well. And I'm currently Facebooking with the gal who runs the Vermilion CS Institute. So, wow. Girl, if you ever need any help with your program, I actually did a lot of leadership courses through the grad program for students. So, um, if you need anything, I can send you my master plan. Like if you need anything at all, let me know. I was actually going to ask you what your grad program was and yeah, that's definitely the one I did.

Speaker 2 01:10:36 Yes. Yeah. So I had my life and it was like conservation and community was the one that just ended. Um, nice. Okay. Yeah. And it was okay. Like it was a good class. Like I had to reach out to people and I didn't know what to do. I ended up studying, um, there are these crayfish in Nashville called Nashville crayfish and they're endemic to Nashville, which is insane. Yeah. And the zoo does a lot of work with them. So I was able to talk to one of the keepers. Who's a friend that works directly with them and he specializes in crayfish. Um, and then he put me in with the state biologists to talk. It was amazing. Yeah. I was on the phone conversation. I was like, it'll only be 20 minutes. And he was like, Oh yeah, I have a little bit of time.

Speaker 2 01:11:23 He kept me on the phone for like over an hour. Um, like super awesome. Super nice. Yeah. He was amazing. Um, and so, cause I don't really know what to do for my son. So back, hold on. The whole thing that ended up being crazy about the Nashville crayfish is that right now the U S fish and wildlife service is proposing to delist them. So that was like a whole other thing that was really cool to be able to look into, um, which it wasn't like into super depth. So I don't know what to do for my master plan, cause this is only my first semester. So like I had to turn in like what my idea was. So right now I'm saying like, maybe that could be my master plan, like working to understand more and do more research about the Nashville crayfish and what it means if they get delisted.

Speaker 2 01:12:15 And I'm kind of excited. Like I think maybe I do want to stick with it. Um, cause we have to do a, like a community thing, right? Like a community leadership thing. Um, which I don't know if it would count as one, but there's a local brewery here called tailgate brewery and they've already worked with the zoo to do, uh, they released the cloudy clouded IPA that, um, featured like artwork of one of our clouded leopards and part of the proceeds with the clouded leopard conservation. Yeah. And so one of the guys, um, we talk a lot on Instagram and he's sup --

-- er nice. Um, and he keeps wanting to work with the zoo and they, I think are planning another one. That's going to be really soon hopefully. Um, and he wants to do one, um, with our, the pre-IND tail porcupine that I work with, I would really like to talk to them about trying to do like a national crayfish one, um, which will be awesome. So I, I don't know if I would assume that would account as like a, a community leadership, whatever. Absolutely, absolutely. Yeah. Like I already have my connections and so I'm like maybe if I do this, like it, I think it would be fun to be able to do that.

Speaker 1 01:13:29 Awesome. Yeah, no, we should off offline off of this. We need to connect and we need to chat like a lot. I can help you so much with everything. So, um, no, I loved the program. Yeah. Cause I remember where you are right now. And I was so utterly confused cause it just made this massive life switch and I was like, grad school, give me an answer. And it sent me on a completely different path. Um, and to where I am now. So yeah, we'll, we'll definitely chat about that. I'm so glad you're doing the global field program. Um, and if anybody's interested in that, totally look it up. Um, yeah. Global field program through Miami university of Ohio. So, and it's all online is really good about the GFC and stuff. Do you take three international trips that are called earth expeditions that are through the program? So

Speaker 2 01:14:20 Really cool. I'm so excited. Yeah. Like I've, I've been wanting to do it for a very long time. Um, but obviously like school is expensive and I still owe a huge chunk of change for my bachelor's degree. Um, but, and it is cheaper, like going through a Miami university and the way they're partnered with project dragon fly way cheaper than if you just wanted to go to a normal grad school. Um, but it's still something that I would, and they let you do a payment plan and stuff like that, but I'm luckily enough to have someone in my life that is helping me with that or else I still would be wishing and hoping and praying that I could go. So I lucked out. Um, and I'm very blessed and have someone that's helping me with that. Um, which is the only reason I can go.

Speaker 2 01:15:11 So I'm like so Stokes, but it's like, I was so stressed when it started too though, because I also put it it's hard to, um, at the same time it started, which I don't know why, like that also stressed me out first off because we're poor. I worked like multiple other jobs. Um, so like I do that. And then I started school, which is only one class at a time when you do the GFP program, at least the first couple of semesters from what I understand. Um, but then, so I'm a part of our national chapter ASAP. And then I got, which I, like, I wanted to, like, I was voted in on it, um, to take over the social media for the exec chapter. And I, like, I stressed about it so much and I was like, Oh my God, I have to like post to Instagram and Facebook and like prepare for these events that are happening especially right now because we can't have that many events.

Speaker 2 01:16:06 So like the events where we can actually hold stuff and like sell things, it's like so important because we weren't able to have all these other conservation events the whole rest of the year. Um, but then it's like, I don't know. I looked at other people's exact pages and they like barely post things very often. So I was like, Oh, I don't know why I was stressing out so much, but I like, I was able to boost the followers, which is very nice. And hopefully it reaches more people as well. Good. That natural exac. Absolutely.

Speaker 1 01:16:39 Exactly. Everyone follow Johnny's the mastermind behind it. No, that's awesome. So speaking of that, um, we've already mentioned a million times that you're very active on social media, but officially where can people follow you and how can they connect with you?

Speaker 2 01:16:56 Yeah. So my name anywhere in everywhere, usually like tic-tac Instagram, Facebook, Twitter. I forget about Twitter a lot. So I randomly post on Twitter. Um, but it's zookeeper Johnny J a w N I E but also like very rare spelling of Johnny. There are other people named that, but if you just type Johnny in, you're going to find me easily, but yeah, zookeeper Johnny everywhere and anywhere. Awesome. Well to wrap this up, this has been so much fun. Do you have any last final asks or requests or pl --

-- ease dues of anyone listening, um, please support your local zoo. Um, again, do your research though, if you don't know much about your local zoo, um, volunteer anywhere with anything like that. Um, even I love to share a lot of, um, things on my social media of even like products that we just want to buy or have to buy.

Speaker 2 01:18:04 Um, if you can afford it or have the means again, um, a lot of companies out there will send part of their proceeds to conservation, which is awesome. Um, so I definitely any way you can help wildlife out do that, um, and support your local street cats, AKA opossums, raccoons, and skunks. They're amazing. Keep them safe. They will keep us safe. That's awesome. So let's throw out some of my favorite animals. Thank you. Awesome. Well, thanks so much. This was so fun. We'll have to do another one. Yeah, you're welcome. It was tons and tons of fun. Thanks.

Speaker 1 01:18:44 Hey, thanks again for listening to this episode of <inaudible>. If you'd like that you heard hit that subscribe button to never miss a future episode. Do you have an environmental organization travel story or research that you'd like to share? Let me know <inaudible> dot com until next time friends together, we will. Rewild the planet.

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