

WINGHAM WILDLIFE PARK

Hello again, it's me Ava! And welcome to my final article as Wingham Wildlife Park's 2024/25 Junior Journalist. I hope you enjoy it as much as I've enjoyed exploring and learning about the zoo over the last year.



In this article, I'll be writing about what it's like to be a **"Keeper for the Day"**, since I was lucky enough to do the experience for my final write-up. It's a great experience and you might even make some new friends, like I did, since I shared the day with two other people. Now you can find out what it's like to be a keeper, and maybe you'll want to try it too!

First, I arrived feeling super excited - I'd never done anything like this before. We were greeted by Savannah, our first animal keeper, and I met "E" and "M", who were doing the experience too (none of us knew each other). Our first job

was to make some enrichments for the animals. We washed our hands (because grubby hands = poorly animals), then grabbed some veggies and placed them into tubs with little square holes.

We left the food for a bit and went to see the enclosure that belongs to two gibbons. Gibbons are apes with extra-long arms, and they hoot either to defend their home or when they're excited. There used to be three gibbons in there, but not anymore. Ollie and Vera were the parents of Pickle (the baby), but sadly Vera didn't want anything to do with her.

Pickle had to be hand-raised by humans. After a while, she got too big to live with people, so Vera was taken out, and Pickle moved in with her dad, Ollie. Because Pickle was raised by humans, she walked around like a human and had to *re-learn* how to swing through ropes like a proper gibbon. It took her ages! I'd only know all of this thanks to Savannah - so, thank you, Savannah! We fed Ollie and Pickle cucumber, lettuce, aubergine and more. They ate almost everything—definitely not fussy eaters!



Next, we went to the **Ring-Tailed Lemur** enclosure. This time, we were allowed *inside* to place the veggie tubs down. There are eight lemurs in there, and the one I remember most is Army, who only has one arm. There were also two black lemurs who looked a bit like werewolves when they stood up! You can only

find them in the wild in Madagascar. They were all super cute. Inside their house, “M” and I scrubbed the enclosure while “E” did poo-picking, then we swapped jobs.



Then we met our next keeper, Emily, and went to see more mammals. First were the **Water Pigs** (also known as Visayan warty pigs). They are extremely endangered, with only about 200 left in the wild in the Philippines. We weren't allowed inside their enclosure, but we threw in their food, like butternut squash, sweet potato, strawberries and pig pellets, for them to sniff out. Max and Achilles (the pigs) had to search around to find it, just like they would in nature. Sadly, people still capture these pigs illegally and sell them on the black market (which isn't an actual market, more like a secret, illegal one). That's why they're the most endangered animals in the whole zoo, as well as having the funniest hairstyle!



Then we met **Reggie the deer**. He's nosy and very greedy. He's a mixed breed and can't have baby deer. He's seven years old and looks like a

big goat since he has no antlers. When I say he was nosy, I mean it! He would follow whoever had food and try to eat everything at once. Lettuce was his favourite. He'd stuff so many pieces into his mouth before finishing the first one, it was hilarious.

They were the goats! They looked super old with long beards even though they were all girls. They weren't fat, just bloated from eating tons of straw and hay. At first, they didn't pay much attention to us, but as soon as we held out the food they went bonkers! Emily wasn't joking when she said they'd go crazy for it. They were all gentle (well, *most* of them). My favourite was Delilah—she was calm, chill, and ate straight from our hands so peacefully.



Now, the **G.O.A.T. (Greatest Of All Time)** award definitely goes to the **wallabies**! They were me, “E”, and “M”'s favourite animals. We got to go into their enclosure, even though there are only four of them they had loads of space. Their fur was super soft. I always thought wallabies had short, stubby tails, but nope, they're long and feel like rough leather. Their favourite food was butternut squash and they also ate lettuce, but only the leafy bits not the crunchy white bit in the middle. Honestly, that's *my* favourite part! Anyone else?



After that, we met Abi, our bird keeper. We put on gloves and first went to the storks. I thought they'd eat fish like penguins, but noo, they eat dead chicks! I had to pick one up by the claw and throw it over the fence. My face was *not* impressed, but hey, it's their food not mine!

caught them in mid-air! Their beaks are so long that we had to stand at the back of the fence so they couldn't poke us through the gaps. Fun fact: pelicans use their *feet* to keep their eggs warm. How weird and amazing is that?



Then we went to my favourite birds, the **lorikeets**! They flew around and landed all over us! We held out bowls of nectar and they all swooped down to drink. Their habitat is colourful and noisy, I loved it.



Next, we passed the penguins and went to see the **pelicans**. We had to wear gloves again because the fish were sticky and gross. But it was SO cool - when we threw the fish they



After lunch (which we got to order from the menu!), we met back up with Emily to feed and clean the **capybaras**. It smelled so *bad*. “M” and I raked the hay out of their bed and bagged it up while “E” and Emily scooped the poo. Then we filled metal tins with sweet potato and placed them around their enclosure.



After that, we went back to the wallabies to spray vanilla perfume in their home. This is called scent enrichment, it gives animals new smells to explore which keeps them curious and stops them from getting bored. Sniffing is serious fun for animals!

Our final stop was the **meerkats**. There are two groups now. Originally, there was only one, but two bossy females wanted to be the leader, so the keepers split them into separate groups. We used toilet roll tubes to make enrichment toys, stuffing them with salad and folding the ends so the food wouldn't fall out.



Thank you so much for reading my last article! I hope you enjoyed it and maybe you'll check out the Keeper for the Day experience yourself. I had SO much fun, and all the keepers were really friendly and super knowledgeable.

I haven't mentioned my little sister Bea yet, but she was *very* jealous I got to do this.

I've had the best time being a Wingham journalist, and I hope you've enjoyed my articles. Maybe you even learned something! If you see me at Wingham again, come and say hello! Bye for now, Ava x

