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Experience of a new registrar at a ZIMS using facility

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Content

The Zoo Registrar position is in most zoos a position which involves the administrative tasks of keeping the animal's records, and complete paperwork which is require by law to keep and transport animals. Registrars work closely together with the keepers, veterinarians and curators/head keepers. The workload for this position depends upon the size of the collection and the size of the zoological institution. With the launching of ZIMS a registrar's job was made a lot easier as it allowed for information sharing between institutions. Additionally, instead of having different programs which had to run separately and were often only available on one single computer ZIMS is web based and can therefore be accessed from anywhere.

This case is based on real life experience. The institution in this scenario is privately owned and has a small collection with carnivores, primates, native species, reptiles, birds and farm animals. The staff consists of two zoo directors, a general manager, head keeper who is head of animal collection, a veterinarian who act as the registrar, an assistant registrar and keepers. The registrar and assistant registrar come from different backgrounds but both have limited previous experience with the husbandry and medical side of ZIMS. The keepers use ZIMS vary rarely at this institution. The institution is a member of a regional association (British and Irish Zoo and Aquarium Association BIAZA) and a member of Species360.

The steps discussed below may be of help to somebody starting out as a registrar in the scenario described above.

First step: familiarize yourself with your institution.
The first step is to familiarize yourself with your institution. This is not only important from the aspect of record keeping but extends to which staff member is responsible for what, the collection of animals, how the institution is run on a day to day basis, and the knowledge of the staff involved (keepers, curators, head keepers, directors, etc.). By taking the time to establish how things work and to familiarize yourself with how your institution is run you may have a smoother transition into your new role. Additionally, it is important to review the state of your records. Things to consider are:
   - Are the records up to date?
   - How have the records been kept in the past and can this still be applied today?
   - Are the records complete?
   - Are the records kept digitally or on paper?
   - How long must records be kept for legislation purposes? (e.g. Zoo licensing legislation)
   - Who was responsible in the past for keeping the records?
   - Is your institution part of a regional or national zoological society (BIAZA, EAZA, AZA, ZAA, WAZA) which may have additional standards for record keeping which may need to be met?

Step 2: meet with the right people to understand what needs to happen
The next step after reviewing the state of your records and before you begin to update your records is to hold a meeting with various heads of departments such as curator/head keeper, veterinarian and directors. By getting everyone in a room you can establish if there are upcoming animal imports

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and exports, changes in the collection (e.g. births, deaths, animals being phased out), getting an overview of the (long term) collection plan and if protocols have been established. Additionally, this will help you gain a better insight to who is responsible for what and what needs to be prioritized. This is also a great way to get to know the staff involved.

Step 3: Prioritize your work (what needs to happen first)

After the meeting discussed in step 2, you should have a clearer picture of short term plans (animal moves, births, death, internal enclosure moves, daily diaries etc.), long term plans (collection plans, animals phasing out or moving in, in five to ten years etc.), who is responsible for what and if there are established protocols for keeping records in place at your institution. However, if this is not entirely clear, do not panic. As with any new job it takes time to familiarize yourself with these aspects. The most important step to take is to prioritize your work. It is important to take the following into account:

- Are there animals moving in or moving out of the collection soon? If so, which forms need to be filled in and what aspects of this is your responsibility.
- Which records need updating with births and deaths in your collection
- Is your institution due for an inspection? If so, it may be a priority to get your records up to date before the inspection as you need to do this to comply with legislation.

Once you have made a list on what needs to happen first, it is time to get to work. Gather the records in one place, be that in a filing cabinet, your office or on a massive whiteboard. Just be advised that you should be able to locate your records quickly and present them to your supervisor, inspectors or other staff members if need be. By keeping your records in one place, you not only know where they are, but it will save you time as you will not be running all over the institution to find a specific record.

Step 4: know who is responsible for what, who is knowledgeable of what and keep people in the know.

As you have met with the heads of various departments, it would be a good advice to familiarize yourself with the keepers or heads of different sections. By knowing who is responsible for which animals or sections and by extent their knowledge concerning their animals, it may help make your job easier. If records need updating and you do not have it on file, then you know who to speak to regarding a particular animal or section. Keepers know their animals best and on occasion on daily records animals may be named by a house name or described which may be unfamiliar to you. Do not be afraid to ask for clarification of which animal is mentioned in the daily records. At a later stage you can always implement a different daily record sheet in which keepers are asked to give ZIMS numbers. Potentially, in the future you may need to provide sections with sheets with tables on in which animals are mentioned with common name, house names, scientific names, descriptions and ZIMS numbers. Additionally, you may be able to update the ZIMS records with house names for the animals as it does make it easier to find them.

It is advised to establish a mailing list of important people as this will help communications along in your institution. This will allow you to quickly distribute files, reports or other documentations to

other sections and people in your institution. This list may include curators, head keepers, head of sections, directors, veterinarians and even keepers. However, it may depend on how your institution is run and the size of it. Potentially, protocols are already in place and this may not be a concern of yours to establish a clear communication tool. However, if not, then this is a great way to keep people in the know.

Step 5: Familiarize yourself with the available software and documents

Now that you have prioritized your work, know your colleagues and your collection it is time to familiarize yourself with the available software. Population management software such as SPARKS, ARKS, MEDARKS or ZIMS can help you keep your records. Familiarize yourself with the kind of software your institution is using. Start up the software and see what it looks like if you are unfamiliar or have never worked with it before.

ZIMS login when your institution is a member

ZIMS requires a login. If your institution has employed a registrar before or if someone was responsible for keeping records in ZIMS your institution should have a login which you can then use to create your own account and to add yourself. If these details have been forgotten, then you can always ask for help by emailing the Support Helpdesk at Species360 on this email address support@species360.org. The friendly people at the helpdesk will be able to help you with all your questions regarding ZIMS.

ZIMS when your institution is not a member

If your institution is not yet a member, more information regarding joining Species360 and ZIMS as a member institution can be found if you follow this link:
https://www.species360.org/membership/benefits-of-membership/

Available help

Now that you have started familiarizing yourself with your own institution, record keeping and available software, you may begin to realize that you potentially need help. Do not worry, there is a wealth of information out there which may suit your needs and help you.

Step 6: available documentation for training

If you have little to no experience working with ZIMS or other software, do not fret. There are many useful sites and documentation that is available to help you.

ZIMS/Species360 training website

The first and most logical website would be the training website of Species360. This can be found on the following link. http://training.species360.org/

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There are various sections on this website which may be useful to you. The first document you should read is the *Getting Started Guide* by Species360 which can be found using the following link http://training.species360.org/Start/. This document will show you the steps that you can take using the ZIMS application to keep your detailed records.

On the ZIMS website there self-paced learning modules which you can go through on your own. However, if you find that you would prefer to have a webinar to learn tips and tricks, or wish to make use of an instructor or even have a personalized online training these are available on the ZIMS website as well. Simply click on the appropriate option and decide which option suits your needs best. When you go to the Support Documentation section there will be additional help documentation available.

Regional groups
If your institution is a member of AZA (North America), WAZA (World Association), EAZA (Europe), BIAZA (U.K), ZAA (Australasia) or any of the other regional association there may be additional documentation available to help you. Additionally, many of the associations have record keeping groups which may be useful to join.

North America
The Zoological Registrars Association (ZRA) is a North American non-profit association which is dedicated to help organize and enhance zoos and aquariums through leadership and professional development. Membership is required for help though. Their website is available on the following link: http://www.zooregistrars.org/. The association runs an annual event in which workshops can be attended.

Europe
If your institution is based in Europe and in the United Kingdom, then you can join the BIAZA Records keeping group. The BIAZA Records Group provides advice to the BIAZA Living Collections Committee and BIAZA members on any management issues involving animal records. You do not need to be a member to access the Yahoo group which can be found by clicking on the following link https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/BIAZARecords/info Additionally if you are on Facebook you can join the Facebook group called BIAZA Records Group. The Records Group has an annual conference.

If your institution is not located in the United Kingdom but within Europe EAZA has a Records forum. If your institution is a member of EAZA you will have access automatically to this forum. If your institution is not a member of EAZA then you can send an email to Sander@species360.org to request access. The following link will give you access to the Records keeping forum if you are a member of EAZA http://www.eaza.net/member_area/EAZARegistrarsForum/default.aspx

Australasia
If your institution is located in the Australasian region you can reach out to the Zoo and Aquarium Association Animal Records Keeping Specialist Advisory Group (ARKSAG). This group provides support

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and assistance to its members. The group has annual meetings which are open to members and invited guests. You can join by sending an email to the current Convenor Gert Skipper at gskipper@zoossa.com.au

Joining any of these groups can not only provide you with useful information, workshops or conferences but is also a useful and wonderful way to meet other registrars at other institutions. By allowing information to be shared, best practice guidelines and tips and tricks from other people you can go about finding what works best for you and your institution regarding recording keeping.

Keep up to date with the latest development
Now that you may have joined a group or have familiarized yourself with the available information and software for record keeping, it is important to keep up with the latest developments. As technology is always changing and evolving so does the world of record keeping. If you have joined a group then it would be advisable to go to regular meetings, workshops or conferences being held by the groups. Most groups run workshops which will give you training with the latest software to keep you up to date. Additionally, refer to the ZIMS website to keep up with the latest development in the software. If you feel as though you need to put yourself on a mailing list to keep up to date, then do so.

Ask for help and advice from other institutions and your contacts
Now that you may have been to a conference, regular meeting or joined a mailing list you may have made some contacts. Or perhaps you have already had these contacts because of previous work experience. If you do happen to be stuck or wish to know how registrars at other institutions keep their records, know that you can always reach out to these contacts outside of the groups and other help documents. Sometimes this may prove insightful to help you in keeping records at your own institution.

The next steps at your institution

At this stage you have been in the job for a little while and you may have a better understanding of your institution, the software provided and how to keep your records. You may also have joined a regional group and made contacts. You may have already made good progress in keeping your records. However, as you may be aware, keeping good animal records is not only the job of a registrar but depends on the input and involvement of other people such as curators, veterinarians, head keepers and keepers. Therefore, there are a few steps you can take to make sure that across your institution an equal standard of animal records is being provided and sought after. This will not only make your work easier but will make sure that everyone is on the same page as to what information needs to be provided in the same format.

Make long term plans and establish work flows and protocols
Now that you have had (potentially several) meetings with the curators, head of keepers, keepers, veterinarians or head of animal collection you should know what the short term and long term plans

are for your institution regarding the animal collection. As you have prioritized your work it is advisable to begin establishing protocols for different animal's records such as:

- Daily records kept by keepers
- Animal imports and exports
- Veterinarian diaries or notes

You can provide, in consultation with heads of section, veterinarians, curators and directors, work flows for your staff members. This can be done in various formats such as:

- Tables which they need to fill in
- Set up accounts in ZIMS for the keepers to put information in
- Provide sheets of paper in a specific format which make it easier to locate and fill out the information you need to keep your records.

Additionally, you can set up specific dates and times when keepers can hand in the diaries. Perhaps it works for you to set aside certain days for certain work (e.g. Monday afternoon for catching up on your medical reports, Tuesday for catching up on your daily reports, Wednesday for imports and exports, etc.). This however depends on personal preference and may not work in all institutions. It depends on your workload, if this is your only responsibility and the size of your institution.
It is advised to establish some sort of information channel to provide information regarding incoming animals, outgoing animals and important information regarding the collection to the people involved such as keepers, head of sections, curators and veterinarians.

Train your staff

If you have the resources available and the time it may be worthwhile to hold training sessions for your staff members such as the keepers. You can provide training in how to keep good records, in ZIMS, or in other aspects of record keeping. By getting all your staff trained in using the same format or the same software you can set a specific standard for your record keeping. Additionally, you will be providing your staff with additional knowledge and resources which may potentially be useful in their own careers.

You can use different ways to train your staff, depending on the work load in your institutions (e.g. the number of sections, visitor numbers and the minimum keepers required to be on a section daily). You can give one on one sessions or even group sessions, depending on what you are trying to teach. Be aware that when teaching staff about ZIMS there are PowerPoints available to show in a room so you can run a workshop. Additionally, you can even create accounts for keepers in ZIMS so they can familiarize themselves with the software and have a go. Speak to your colleagues and deicide what works best for your institution.

You have reached the end of the help guide. We hope that these tips have been helpful to you in your starting position as registrar for a small institution. Please do remember that these tips may not work for everyone. Do what you feel works best for you and your institution and most all of enjoy the position.