

A MAN OF THE ZOO

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'Are you a... man of the Zoo?' asked the six year old boy. I knew where the question was going before he had finished it, and I was overflowing with pride by the time I could reply 'I am. I am a Man of the Zoo.' That's the power of the red T-shirt we wear in the Education team. Because in truth it was my second week at the zoo and I was still so fresh-faced that I got lost that very evening while looking for the red pandas. But let's focus on the status of those red T-shirts if we may.

Usually when you think of zoo people, you think green outfits. And indeed my only hesitation in taking up the seasonal presenter job here is that red tops don't go well with my Irish complexion. Frankly, it leaves me looking like Noddy. But it's easy to live with that in the circumstances.

Those circumstances being, of course, that I work in a zoo. I deliver half a dozen presenter-talks during the day: Feeding Times & Presenter Talks (/talks-shows) Visiting the Zoo at the scheduled time you'll see a red T-shirted presenter at one of those six exhibits. For example, in front of the orang utans' islands at 3 pm. We'll tell you about the animals here, their lives, and their place in the bigger picture for orang utans and the environment in Indonesia. And then I'll stick around for a chat, because that's fun too.

The role could be described by pinching Lord Reith's goal for the BBC: 'to educate, inform, and entertain the listener'. I used to work for the BBC so I'm sure the late Lord won't mind me stealing his values and applying them to Paignton Zoo and conservation. Indeed for me this role is a combination of the presentation and production skills of my previous career in broadcasting, with my new career direction of conservation.

This is, after all, a seasonal job. A few weeks after I wrap up working for the Zoo's Education Department, the role will reverse and I will go back to university to study a Masters in Conservation Science.

Student life will be a change - still reading up about zoo and field-based conservation, yes, but the teacher will become the pupil, with no more uniform red T-shirts, and no more proudly stating that yes, I am a man of the Zoo.

Connor Walsh - Seasonal Presenter at Paignton Zoo

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Gifts (/explore/blog/category/gifts)	(2)
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