

# The Wilds: Interpretive Tour Guide

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## Mission Statement

*"To lead and inspire by connecting people and wildlife."*



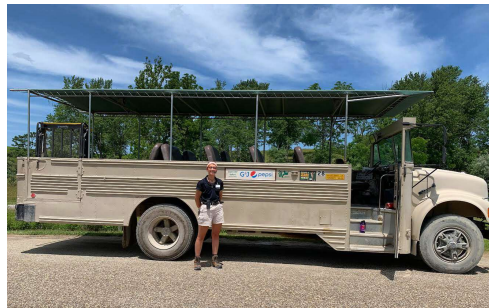
Head 1, I pose for a photo with some of the Wilds' Southern White Rhinos after working a special event at "the Outpost" in pasture.

## Background

- The Wilds is a private, non-profit conservation organization built on 10,000 acres of land reclaimed after being surface mined for coal.
- The Wilds is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and participates in local and global conservation efforts with exotic and native species.

## How did you find your job?

- I learned about the Wilds while working a season in the Columbus Zoo's call center in 2020-21. Since working in that position, I have kept an eye on online job postings for positions at both parks.



Head 2, I am pictured standing in front of one of the converted school buses that I drove while giving tours. A bus, radio, microphone, and gate remote were my day-to-day tools.

## On the Job

- A typical day included giving 2-3 bus driven tours. Open-air safari tours are about 2 hours and 15 minutes long. During this time I provided information about the Wilds' history, current conservation programs, and animals in an engaging way.
- I often worked in the admissions office as well. These shifts, I drove a van through pasture to drop destination staff off and then assisted in checking guests in and booking reservations in the office.



Head 3, Banteng (*Bos javanicus*), wild cattle native to Southeast Asia. Just one of the endangered species seen on tour.

Head 4 (below, left), A few fellow tour guides and I joined as a team to represent the Wilds at the Columbus Zoo's annual "Zoolympics" competition for seasonal employees.



## Highlights

- I was able to work donor events, give specialty tours, and assist administration staff in preparing for the park's Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) inspection.
- Networking opportunities with different department directors including the heads of Animal Management, Education, and Restoration Ecology.



Head 5, "Tuffy" the reticulated giraffe, one of the most sociable members of the Wilds' giraffe herd. Interacting with Tuffy was one of the highlights of my season.



Head 6, "Gobi" a critically endangered Bactrian camel (*Camelus bactrianus*) native to Central Asia. The Bactrian Camels were a guest favorite because of their interesting adaptations, inquisitive behavior, and unique appearance.

## Reflection

I have had a very productive first season working as an interpretive tour guide at the Wilds. I currently intend to return next summer to build upon the experience I have gained this season. Next year, I hope to take on a greater role in program planning and pursue advancement opportunities within guest services. During the off-season this winter, I will be working as a Planning and Design intern at the Columbus Zoo-an opportunity I was made aware of through my position as a tour guide. I feel that I have been welcomed into the community of the organization and look forward to building upon the connections I made this season.



Head 7, A Pere David doe that I was able to get close to while taking a Wildside tour. Wildside tours are a more exclusive tour and are given by animal management staff. It is possible for bus guides to be promoted into this position and gain animal care experience.

## Recommendations for another student?

- All I needed to succeed in this position was customer service experience and a willingness to work.
- Say yes to any "odd jobs" you might be offered! Even if the first job you take within an organization is not your dream job, the experience will likely be relevant later on.



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