



Local Girl has wish to be a zookeeper granted by Starlight at ZSL Whipsnade Zoo

Nine year old Holly Hudd from Guildford in Surrey has had her wish of a lifetime to be a zoo keeper for the day at Whipsnade Zoo granted by Starlight Children's Foundation the national charity that grants wishes of a lifetime for seriously and terminally ill children.

Holly was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia in November 2013 and is currently on a course of Chemotherapy expecting to last over two years. Since being ill Holly hasn't been able to attend school and her ballet classes as often as she would like and has missed spending time with her friends. She adores animals especially meerkats and sea lions and loves watching wildlife programmes.

When Holly was referred to Starlight earlier this it didn't take her long to choose her wish to be a zoo keeper for the day. Holly's treatment meant her wish couldn't take place until last week but the excitement that it was to be granted has kept Holly going particularly when her treatment made her feel unwell.

Starlight contacted ZSL Whipsnade Zoo to ask if they might be able to help grant Holly's wish and they jumped at the chance to give holly a day to remember.

The family Holly, mum, Emma and dad, arrived bright and early and were met by Stephanie one of the Zoo Keepers and without delay went straight to the Sea Lions enclosure to meet Dominic, Bailey and Lara. Dominic being the cheekiest of the trio gave Holly a kiss on the cheek which she was delighted with! Holly helped with each of the Sea lions daily activities and then fed them some fish as a treat!

Feeling a little smelly but very happy Holly was then invited to watch the Birds of Prey demonstration and hear all about the various birds of prey taking part including a bald eagle, macaws, and hawks.

Everyone then hopped onto the Whipsnade Steam Railway which took the family to see the elephants and rhinos close-up before dropping the family at one of the Zoo cafes for lunch.

After a short rest it was time to meet the popular penguins and Holly arrived just in time to help the zoo keeper feed them as part of the penguin demonstration for all visitors. This was quite a responsibility but Holly performed just as well as the penguins though the smell of fish was by now becoming more intense!-

Next, for Whipsnade's newest zoo keeping recruit was a visit to meet the giraffes and to feed them. Holly soon learnt that whilst giraffes look very cute they are very cheeky and very strong even a little baby one who was standing alongside his mum.

As Meerkats are a particular favourite of Holly's the zoo arranged for Holly and her mum to meet Ringo, George, and Paul and to feed them with their appetizing meal of live crickets! Holly was unperturbed by this but mum felt less comfortable as the crickets kept jumping around!

Lastly as an extra surprise Holly was asked if she would like to go and feed the lions! Holly jumped at the chance of seeing such majestic creatures' close-up but safely behind bars in their enclosure.

Holly's mum Emma said, "Holly has had a fantastic day here at Whipsnade we couldn't have asked for more. She loved meeting the sea lions and to get a kiss from one of her favourite animals was a real treat. We would like to thank Starlight for granting her wish and of course everyone at Whipsnade for allowing us such a wonderful behind-the-scenes experience. We have lots of lovely memories to treasure from Holly's wish."