



# IT'S A Wild Life

THERE'S NEVER A DULL MOMENT  
FOR THIS ANIMAL DOCTOR.



By Cynthia Hawthorne  
Illustration by Thomas Reis

**W**ithin seconds, the massive, full-grown Bengal tiger had gone from sleeping with her head in Jeffrey Jenkins' lap to standing eye-to-eye in front of him.

In an instant, this routine teeth cleaning had become a heart-pounding situation because the anesthesia had worn off early. Jenkins looked around for help as the zookeepers quickly made their escape.

He was alone with the tiger. Grabbing her by the tail, he struggled to position himself to give her another shot of anesthetic, and he finished his work.

This was just one day on Jenkins' journey to becoming an avian and exotic veterinarian.

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This 3½-inch-long funnel web spider was brought to see Dr. Jenkins because it was having issues shedding.

### Real-Life Dr. Dolittle

In the second grade on a classroom trip to the school's library, Jenkins found his life's calling in the pages of *Doctor Dolittle*.

"I checked the book out more as a training manual," Jenkins jokes. At his family's home in the mountains outside Salt Lake City, Utah, he raised rabbits, guinea pigs, birds, dogs, cats and even an orphaned fawn. "Once I found out that animals had their own doctors, I wanted to become one."

Many of the adults in Jenkins' life cautioned him that it was too hard to become a vet and that he should pursue another career. But he never gave up. Jenkins graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in biology from The University of Utah. He didn't get in to veterinary school on his first try. But Colorado State University later accepted him, and he completed his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine.

After advanced training at the Denver Zoological Gardens — home of that tiger — and a working residency at an animal medical center, Jenkins opened the Avian & Exotic Animal Hospital in San Diego, California, in 1987.

### Unusual Patients

Jenkins' patients include reptiles such as bearded dragons and panther chameleons, exotic cats, monkeys, small mammals such as guinea pigs and chinchillas, and even arachnids (like spiders and scorpions). The hospital is open to all birds (that's where the "avian" part comes from) and exotic animals, which include any animals besides domestic cats and dogs.

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He spends a lot of time talking to people and teaching them about their animals' diets and how to take care of them. "Most problems come from not understanding what the animals need."

In any one day, Jenkins might reset a golden eagle's broken leg, test a wild coastal gray fox for distemper, diagnose why a tortoise is lethargic, groom a parrot's beak and talons, give an iguana its annual checkup and perform surgery on a fish.

"Surgery can be like building with an Erector set — especially when it includes pins, wires and screws for broken bones," Jenkins says.

"Arachnids are the most interest-

ing animals to me, because so little is known about them."

Jenkins is a comparative physiologist, a person who studies the function of living systems and how those functions vary from animal to animal.

"Spiders have interesting physiology. They can crack their exoskeletons — their outside casing — much like us breaking a bone, be repaired and go on with their lives."

### Serving the Community

Jenkins' clinic is a teaching hospital, which provides opportunities for college students to serve internships and residencies. With the hospital's elementary-school program, Doctor for a Day, an area youth gets to spend four hours at the hospital involved in all aspects of working as an exotic animal veterinarian.

In his career, former Life Scout Jenkins uses lessons he learned in Scouting: "organization, follow-through, how to get along with people and ani-

mals, to be curious and cautious and yet not to be fearful. In my job, if I'm afraid, the animals can sense it and the situation becomes worse."

Scouting also taught him about success. "If you are curious and you have successes because of those curiosities — like flipping wood and finding newts, salamanders and animal nests — then that makes the next time more enticing. You have a chance for success because you've taken a chance.

"I love what I do. It's a very cool profession. I can't imagine doing anything else," Jenkins says. "Do something that you enjoy and you're proud of. Live your life so that you're proud of yourself." ♣



Dr. Jenkins with a juvenile golden eagle from a local wildlife rescue organization.



Above: Domestic ferrets in for a checkup and looking for trouble. Right: A green iguana patient with back-leg problems.



This parakeet's extra-long beak indicates liver disease caused by an all-seed diet.



### JOB FACTS: Veterinarian

**WHAT TO EXPECT:** Veterinarians care for the health of animals. They diagnose, treat and research medical conditions and diseases of pets and livestock, as well as wild and zoo animals.

**JOB OUTLOOK:** Jobs for veterinarians are expected to grow rapidly in the next 10 years. There are jobs working in animal hospitals and zoos, for the government, in research centers or at universities.

**EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE:** Veterinarians must earn a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree. To prepare for such a program, take biology, physiology and other animal-related courses, as well as math — algebra is used every day in calculating medicine dosages. You should also take English classes to prepare for writing articles and papers. Also, volunteer at a wildlife rehabilitation center for hands-on experience.

**SALARY:** Pay varies according to location, experience and specialty. Annual pay ranges from less than \$49,000 to more than \$145,000.

**FOR MORE INFO:** *I Want to Be a Veterinarian* by Stephanie Maze and Catherine O'Neill Grace. Sandpiper. \$10 softcover, ages 8 and up.

*Veterinarian (Cool Careers)* by William David Thomas. Gareth Stevens Publishing. \$10.50 softcover, ages 10 and up.

*Veterinarian (Cool Careers)* by Barbara A. Somerville. Gareth Stevens Publishing. \$28.50 hardcover, ages 9 and up.

[boyslife.org/links/vetjobs](http://boyslife.org/links/vetjobs)

Doc Jenkins always has such great magazines in the waiting room!

