

“Winter as a Zookeeper – Problems for the Catoctin Wildlife Preserve”

As the Catoctin Wildlife Preserve begins preparations to open for the season, much of the staff is hard at work finalizing new exhibits and displays. Boasting an impressive collection of over 450 animals divided amongst 319 species, each employee has multiple projects to address every day to ensure that everything is healthy, and all public areas are clean and accessible. However, much of this work has been hindered by weather issues, creating icy, unsafe paths or muddy walkways. According to Mary Ellis, Lead Keeper of Hoofstock, “Honestly, much of the ice didn’t bother me – it’s the mud. Our vehicles couldn’t travel through it, so I had to spend two hours carrying bales of hay up the hill one at a time just to be sure the bison were fed.”

The weather has also been a problem for bird keeper Lauren Caponiti as she tries to prepare the yard for the Australia exhibit. “It isn’t even the yard that is the problem, I could clean it up. But with weather like this, it becomes dangerous to move animals around and so I can’t get into the yard in the first place. I have to make sure the animals stay warm and dry,” said Caponiti.

Many of these problems have been addressed by curator Laurie Hahn Catoctin Wildlife Preserve will be proceeding with their scheduled opening in late March.