



SPCA Scientific Officer

SPCA has a team of Animal Welfare Scientists who carry out evidence-based research to make positive changes to the way animals are seen and treated in New Zealand. They spend a lot of time researching and learning about what animals need and want for good welfare, and work with people to raise awareness around the importance of animal welfare. SPCA Scientific Officers also write submissions for changes whenever there are new laws, regulations, or plans proposed that would impact animals' welfare.

Staff Interview:

We interviewed Alison Vaughan about her experience as an SPCA Scientific Officer and here's what she had to say:



1 Why did you want to become an SPCA Scientific Officer?

When I was at school, I wanted to be a veterinarian. As I grew older, I realised I was most excited about understanding the behaviour of animals to improve their welfare. Therefore, I pursued a PhD in Large Animal Clinical Sciences, a Masters in Applied Animal Behaviour and Welfare, and a Bachelor of Science in Applied Animal Behaviour Science.

My passion for animal training, as well as finding creative ways of improving animal welfare took me in many unexpected directions, including my PhD research where I explored how to improve animal welfare and reduce environment impacts by potty training cows!

I have worked in research, farm animal welfare, and companion animal care jobs in many different countries but when I saw this role advertised I made the decision to move to New Zealand to work as a Scientific Officer with SPCA NZ and haven't looked back since!





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2 What are the main responsibilities or tasks as an SPCA Scientific Officer?

This is always the hardest question to answer as no two days are the same!

Some of the work I do involves developing national animal welfare policies and procedures for SPCA. To do this, I look at the latest research, international recommended best practice, and feedback from our own SPCA staff to develop evidence-based rules and recommendations for looking after animals in SPCA's care. This helps us to act as 'One SPCA', so animals coming into our SPCA Centres will receive the same high quality care, no matter where they live in the New Zealand.

I also support our Inspectorate by providing evidence-based expert opinions in cruelty cases and write submissions to Government or industry bodies to advocate for improvements to animal welfare.



3 What do you enjoy most about being an SPCA Scientific Officer?

I love the collaborative nature of the work; both working to find common ground to progress animal welfare with other organisations and individuals, including those with different world views, and also working with other teams within SPCA to improve animal welfare. There are so many talented, passionate individuals working for SPCA and it is exciting to see what we are able to achieve when we work together. The diversity of work satisfies my curiosity and I love doing something that makes a difference.





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4 What did you have to do to become an SPCA Scientific Officer?

SPCA's Scientific Officers have a diverse range of backgrounds, from social science to animal welfare. This helps us to build a team with diverse and complementary expertise. Diversity is important as our backgrounds and life experiences can influence how we approach a problem. Together we create more complete understanding of animal welfare issues and are able to build robust, creative solutions.

To become a Scientific Officer at SPCA you need to have a Masters or PhD in a relevant subject, which includes animal welfare or animal behaviour. We also look for people who have practical experience in a relevant field, which includes hands on experience of animal care.

5 What skills do you think you need to be an SPCA Scientific Officer?

Passion, resilience, and empathy. Everyone at SPCA is passionate about animal welfare; this is the reason why we get up and go to work every morning! However, improving animal welfare is a marathon, not a sprint - it is important to balance this with maintaining a life outside of work and practicing self-care. While sometimes we celebrate big wins, this work can at times be challenging and it is important to be give yourself opportunities to recharge so you can give 100% in your work.

Practicing empathy and compassionately listening to other people's viewpoints, maintaining a positive world view, and creating meaningful positive human behaviour change to improve animal welfare, are also key.

6 What advice would you give to someone who wants to become an SPCA Scientific Officer?

The same advice I would give anyone; pursue what you are passionate about and stay open to opportunities because you never know where they may lead. When I was younger I didn't even know this role existed but I doggedly pursued my passion of studying animal behaviour and welfare and tried many different jobs to gain life experience and find out what was the best fit for me.



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How to become an SPCA Scientific Officer:

At SPCA, we have Scientific Officers that come from different backgrounds and specialise in particular animal welfare areas. However, tertiary qualifications in a relevant discipline, preferably at a post-graduate level and ideally, with a PhD or MSc in animal welfare is the main requirement to become a Scientific Officer.

Additionally, below are some qualifications and experience needed to work as a Scientific Officer at SPCA:

- Broad knowledge of the animal welfare issues.
- Experience in scientific research
- Experience completing critical reviews of scientific literature
- Experience of constructing scientific reports, papers, letters and information sheets.
- Well-developed research and analytical skills.
- Excellent verbal and written science communication skills.
- Computer literate with a familiarity with electronic database management.
- Working knowledge of statistics.

Fun SPCA Scientific Officer:

As SPCA, we have several expert scientists. Our Scientific Officers specialise in wild animals, companion animals, and farmed animals (including fish!) They use evidence-based research to improve animal welfare in New Zealand.

