



## STAFF REPORT

To: Board of Management

From: Dr. William Rapley  
Executive Director  
Conservation, Education & Research

Subject: **VOLUNTEER SERVICES REPORT – 2009**

Date: 2010-02-05

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### **Summary:**

The purpose of this report is to review and update the Board of Management on the activities of the Volunteer Services Unit for the year 2009. Zoo Volunteers interact with the public, interpreting exhibits and furthering our education and conservation mandate. The Zoo's 340 Volunteers donated 27,846 hours and contacted over 794,600 people. The program benefits from a stable and long-term group of volunteers who are deeply committed to the work of the Zoo and importantly, thoroughly enjoy interacting with our visitors of all ages.

### **Recommendation:**

**It is recommended that this report be received for information.**

### **Background:**

The Volunteer Services Unit recruits, trains and co-ordinates a large group of Volunteers who help to support the objectives of the Zoo, providing an educational experience for Zoo visitors and inspiring people to live in sustainable ways that promote the well being of our natural world. The Zoo's 340 Volunteers raise the public's awareness of and involvement in conservation, interpret the zoogeographic and ecological relationships of the animal and plant kingdoms, and most importantly, enhance the experience of each Zoo visitor with whom they come in contact. It is important to maintain the motivation and enthusiasm of these Volunteers within a challenging program, to maximize the variety of opportunities for Volunteers to interact with visitors. It is also necessary to ensure this group is well informed on a daily basis. In 2009, Volunteers donated 27,846 hours of their time to the Zoo, contacting approximately 794,657 people. Of these active Volunteers, 220 donated their time on a year-round basis, 63 Volunteers were trained to assist during the peak summer season and 58 Student Volunteers provided assistance with a variety of special events. On average, Year-Round Volunteers give 120 hours per year of their time. A description of the categories of volunteers and their responsibilities is provided in Appendix I.

### **Comments/Discussion:**

Key accomplishments in 2009:

#### **Volunteers continue to make a valuable contribution to the Zoo**

In 2009, as a unit Volunteers donated 27,846 hours of their time to the Zoo and contacted approximately 794,657 people. The value of this time is equivalent to approximately 15 full time staff at an average entry level wage, representing approximately \$670,000.

#### **One-hundred and nine new volunteers were recruited and attended volunteer training courses**

Eighteen people completed thirteen weeks of training to become Year-Round Volunteers. In addition, sixty-three Summer Volunteers were trained to assist visitors at interpretive stations throughout the Zoo during the busy months of May to August. Summer Volunteers staffed the Conservation Connection Centre, Stingray Bay, Kesho Park Headquarters, Savanna Research Station, Wetlands Kiosk, Backyard Wildlife kiosk and Front Gate Information area. Twenty-eight new Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers also joined the Volunteer group, assisting at special events and with our Zoo Kids camp program.

#### **Volunteers continued to expand and upgrade their skills**

a) Volunteer monthly meetings provide continuing education. 2009 presentations included:

- \* Tom Mason , Curator of Birds and Invertebrates
- \* Richard Johnstone, Curatorial Keeper and Karen Hamilton, Animal Care Supervisor
- \* Heidi Manicki, African Rainforest Pavilion Keeper
- \* Sheila Bowman, Seafood Watch Manager, Monterey Bay Aquarium and Cindy Lee, Curator of Fishes
- \* Shawn Blackburn, Public Programs Co-ordinator
- \* Retirement presentation to Caroline Greenland and an introduction to our new outreach program "Zoo to You"
- \* Karen Hamilton, Eric Cole, and Oliver Claffey, Animal Care Supervisors
- \* Maria Franke, Curator of Mammals

b) A series of refresher training sessions were delivered during the winter months for Year Round Volunteers. Sessions included: workshop sample tours for Grade 3 "Growth & Change in Plants" and Grade 6 "Biodiversity", AZA messaging, Security & Safety refresher, Effective Communication (including group work to demonstrate how to handle different scenarios), and Virtual Space Sessions (informal learning opportunities on a variety of topics through discussions and a sharing of knowledge.)

#### **The Zoo continues to benefit from the dedication of long-service volunteers**

In 2009, Audrey Johnson was recognized for 30 years as a Zoo Volunteer. Sally Filosa celebrated 25 years of service and four of her fellow Volunteers achieved 20 year recognition. An additional eight Volunteers celebrated 15 years at the Zoo and another ten were recognized for contributions of 10 years. A Volunteer Appreciation Night was held in April at which all were honoured for their years of dedication and presented with a keepsake of their achievement.

The Zoo supports a variety of recognition events and programs for volunteers

- a) In 2009, ten Volunteers received 10 year pins, eight received ostrich eggs for 15 years of service, four received framed “art” produced by Zoo animals for 20 years of dedication, and one was honoured with a certificate and 25 year pin.
- b) Volunteers were recognized each day throughout National Volunteer Appreciation Week, April 19 to 24, with Lindor chocolates, coffee / tea and light snacks.
- c) Volunteers’ recognition events were held in June (Strawberries and Wine) and December (Christmas Party).
- d) A newsletter for Volunteers is produced each month (It’s Happening), in addition to “Browse”, keeping Volunteers informed about Zoo events.
- e) Volunteers receive uniforms partially subsidized by the Zoo.
- f) An appreciation day was held September 3 for Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers including snacks, games and behind the scenes tours.
- g) A thank you dinner was provided September 16 for Summer Information Volunteers.

Volunteer opportunities created for Sharks at Stingray Bay: A Touching Experience

Two new portable touch carts debuted for the special Sharks at Stingray Bay: A Touching Experience exhibit. One focussed on the Seafood Watch program, educating visitors on how to make sustainable seafood choices. The other, titled “Ocean Life”, displayed the vast array of biodiversity in marine ecosystems.

New interpretive experiences developed for Tundra Trek

A portable touch cart and roaming interpretive position debuted in August 2009 with the opening of the Tundra Trek. The touch cart displayed numerous polar bear biofacts and research devices (e.g. radio collar) with a focus on global warming. The roaming interpretive “goose camp” position included more fascinating hands-on opportunities to highlight traditional knowledge.

Volunteers assisted with Zoo-Za-Pa-Looza, celebrating the Zoo’s 35<sup>th</sup> birthday

The “Toronto Zoo Stars” touch cart, located at the front courtyard, highlighted Zoo animals that are the biggest, fastest, heaviest and or celebrating 35 years at the Zoo. The second touch cart, “Animal Birthday Loot Bags”, located at the Zellers Discovery Zone Courtyard, focussed on animal enrichment. Fourteen Year-Round and Summer Information Volunteers and four Zoo Ambassadors worked at these tables over the two day event, enhancing the visitor experience.

New “Gorilla Experience” touch table developed

To support the “Year of the Gorilla” and to enhance our interpretation in the African Rainforest Pavilion a new touch table was developed around the theme “although gorillas are different than humans, we are very much alike.” This concept is explored through the areas of diet, bone structure, facial expressions, pregnancy, social organization as well as briefly looking at the current research occurring in the field.

Zoo Ambassador shadowing opportunities continued

Once again this summer, in an effort to increase the involvement of the Student Volunteers, several shadowing opportunities were offered. Students were paired with one or more volunteers operating interpretive stations around the Zoo. They had the opportunity to expand their knowledge and participate in on-site, front line educational opportunities with visitors. Student Volunteers also assisted with our Rise ‘n’ Shine program at the Sharks at Stingray Bay exhibit.

Valuable animal data gained from volunteer observations

Volunteers observed numerous animals this year, lending their analytical skills to important data collection on a variety of species. In particular, Volunteers completed a two-month long study of the lion-tailed macaques new geothermal-heated exhibit, as requested by Dave Ireland, Curator of Conservation. Many other observations were carried out including snow geese, cheetahs, elephants, and Komodo dragons.

Student Volunteers assist with summer camps

Fifteen Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers completed one day of training in June and assisted staff with our Zoo Kids (ages 4 & 5) day camps throughout the summer, contributing 898 hours for this 10-week summer.

Volunteers provide special tours for Zoo Members

During the winter months Volunteers share their wealth of knowledge with Zoo Members through free tours offered on a variety of topics such as, "Zoo Babies", "Zoo Animal Care", "Zoo Animal Families", and "Zoo Animal Stars".

**Conclusions:**

The Volunteer program is a valuable asset to the Zoo that furthers our education and conservation mandate with the public. The program benefits from a stable and long-term group of volunteers who are deeply committed to the work of the Zoo and importantly, thoroughly enjoy interacting with our visitors of all ages.

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**List of Attachments:**

Appendix 1 – Volunteer Categories

**Year Round Zoo Volunteers**, are selected on the basis of their concern for and knowledge of the natural environment combined with their enjoyment of helping others discover the natural world. These volunteers are asked to commit to a minimum of 75 hours per year for two years. Their duties include:

- conducting tours for school groups, families, and scout/guide organizations;
- presenting Outreach Programs in schools and community organizations;
- staffing Touch Tables in each of the pavilions;
- assisting Education staff with student and teacher workshops;
- helping Development staff prepare mailings;
- assisting staff at Special Events such as “Boo at the Zoo”, Christmas Treats Walk” and “New Years Eve Family Countdown”;
- animal observation data collection as requested by Animal Care staff and Curators
- During the summer months, Volunteer responsibilities expand to include interpretive areas of the Zoo such as: Kesho Park Headquarters, Savanna Research Tent, the Backyard Wildlife Kiosk in the Kids Zoo and the Wetlands Kiosk.

**Zoo Ambassadors** are secondary or post-secondary students who volunteer a minimum of 20 hours per year. Their responsibilities include:

- Special Events such as “Boo at the Zoo”, Member's Christmas Parties and “Love at the Zoo”;
- Assisting staff with summer Zoo Kids (ages 4 & 5) camp programs.

**Summer Volunteers** are recruited for the busy months from May to August and are required to donate a minimum of 36 hours during this time. Their duties include:

- Staff the main gate Information Map, greeting and informing people of what the Zoo has to offer
- Provide interpretation throughout the Kids Zoo
- Provide interpretive information at areas such as the Wetlands Kiosk, Kangaroo/Emu walkthrough, and Kesho Park Headquarters

### **Event Highlights**

Volunteers presented programs and continued to support and enhance a number of events both on the Zoo site and within the community. Some of these include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disney Concerts for Conservation</li><li>• Spring / Fall fairs at various schools</li><li>• Canada Day Activities at Queen’s Park</li><li>• City Councillors and MPP Picnics</li><li>• Party for the Planet / Earth Day Events</li><li>• Wild Toy Animal Hospital</li><li>• Love at the Zoo</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• March Break Events</li><li>• Adopt-A-Pond Spring Toad Festival</li><li>• Easter Egg-stravaganza</li><li>• Boo at the Zoo</li><li>• Oasis Zoo Run (5K, 10K)</li><li>• Teachers Day</li><li>• Members’ Christmas Parties &amp; Special Tours</li></ul>
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