

To: Board of Management

From: Manager, Learning & Engagement

Subject: **VOLUNTEERING & ENGAGEMENT REPORT 2019**

Date: 2020-01-10

SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to review and update the Board of Management on the activities of the Volunteering & Engagement Unit for the year 2019. The volunteer team consists of Year-Round Volunteers, Summer Volunteers, Volunteer Hosts, Wildlife Health Centre Volunteers, and Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers. All volunteers support the Zoo's educational programs by interacting with guests, helping to raise public awareness and involvement in conservation, interpreting the zoogeographic and ecological relationships of the animal and plant kingdoms, and enhancing the experience of each Toronto Zoo guest with whom they come in contact. In 2019, a team of 431 volunteers donated 39,088 hours of their time to the Toronto Zoo reaching an estimated 1,033,138 people.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Manager, Learning and Engagement recommends that:

- 1. The Toronto Zoo Board of Management receive this report for information.**

COMMENTS:

One hundred forty-eight volunteers were recruited and attended volunteer training courses

Forty-three people completed the ten-session course to become Year-Round Volunteers. In addition, 45 Summer Volunteers were trained to assist guests at interpretive stations throughout the Zoo during the busy months of May to August. Sixteen new Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers also joined the 28 returning volunteers in this group, assisting at special events and with summer Zoo Camp programs. Fifteen Volunteer Hosts joined our roster, and an additional 29 individuals were part of the Wildlife Health Centre Volunteer program.

Effective volunteer engagement results in high numbers of volunteers returning and progressing to leadership positions

In 2019, approximately 35% of volunteers from our short-term programs (Summer Information Volunteer, Volunteer Host, and Wildlife Health Centre Volunteer) moved up to our Year-Round Volunteer program, one which requires a higher investment of time,

knowledge, and skills. These trends have continued to be strong over several years, indicating the success in our objective of increasing our volunteer roster by providing a positive introductory volunteer experience through short-term volunteer opportunities.

New interpretive stations added to further enliven the guest experience

We widened our impact on-site in 2019 by adding four new seasonal volunteer-led interpretive areas. Themes focused on priority messaging such as bat conservation, plastics pollution, horticulture, and making that important first connection with nature for our youngest guests.

Volunteers continued to expand and upgrade their skills

Volunteer monthly meetings provide continuing education. 2019 presenters included:

Maria Franke, Manager, Welfare Science

Stuart McKenzie, Director of Migration Ecology, Bird Studies Canada

Jennifer Tracey, Senior Director of Strategic Communications & Guest Experience

Eric Cole, Director, Wildlife Care & Welfare

Alison Babin, Keeper, Wildlife Care

Dolf DeJong, CEO

Angela Haseltine-Pozzi, Founder and Artistic Director of Washed Ashore Project

Jason Pootoolal, Keeper, Wildlife Care

Josh Narjes, Keeper, Wildlife Care

Rebecca Clark, Keeper, Wildlife Care

Tharusha Wijewardena, Ph.D. candidate, Laurentian University

A series of refresher training sessions were delivered during the winter months for Year-Round Volunteers. Sessions included: horticulture and greenhouse tours and training, policy reviews, Wildlife Health Centre refresher training, and additional training in interpretation.

Additional relevant skill development was fostered through various other training sessions throughout the year.

New in 2019, we were able to offer online training through our volunteer management system. Training delivered through this method included: Toronto Zoo By-Laws, Toronto Zoo Policies, Learning & Engagement Branch Instructions, overview of conservation, and end of course assignments for year-round volunteer trainees.

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

Over 60 volunteers received recognition awards for their dedicated service to the Zoo at our annual Volunteer Appreciation/Strawberries and Wine event held in June. This included four volunteers recognized for 10 years of service, five volunteers awarded for 15 years of service, five volunteers reaching the 20 year level, and four volunteers with 25 years of service. We also awarded volunteers in our hourly service award categories, a program that was introduced to recognize and motivate volunteers who contribute high

numbers of hours over a short amount of time, or who show longstanding commitment in our seasonal volunteer programs. A total of 48 volunteers received recognition for their cumulative hourly service contributions. This included 23 volunteers with over 350 hours of service, 21 volunteers with more than 750 hours of service, three with more than 1,150 hours of service, one at the 1,500 hours of service level, and finally one volunteer reaching the 1,850 hour achievement level.

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

Volunteer recognition events were held in June (Strawberries and Wine and Volunteer appreciation awards ceremony), October (seasonal volunteer appreciation day), and December (Winter Holiday Party). Sixty-six volunteers received service awards at the June event. Toronto Zoo would like to acknowledge the Board of Management members who took the time to attend the appreciation events and thank the Volunteers in person. As well, volunteers were recognized each day throughout National Volunteer Week in April with light breakfast snacks and refreshments. Six Year-Round Volunteers and two youth volunteers were honoured for their service through the annual Volunteer Service Awards organized by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Volunteers are kept informed about important Zoo information and events via regular emails and posts, in addition to the staff newsletter "Browse". Volunteers receive uniforms partially subsidized by the Zoo.

New partnership with Centennial College strengthens our communication of messaging

Working with the college's Product Design & Development and Museum and Cultural Management programs, we co-developed interpretive materials and introduced students to the Zoo and our interpretive writing process, setting the stage for further collaboration in 2020 via signage development and internships.

Valuable animal data gained from volunteer observations

Volunteers continue to provide support to Wildlife Care staff by participating in animal observation studies throughout the year. Important information has been collected in 2019 for many animals including: giraffe, Himalayan tahr, iguana, kudu, lemur, ostrich, tree kangaroo, and zebra.

Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers assist with summer camps

Twenty-five Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers assisted staff with day camps throughout the summer, contributing 894 hours.

Volunteers support a number of Species Awareness Days

Volunteers and Zoo Ambassadors were active in operating a number of activities and interpretive tables in support of international conservation days for animals such as bats, giraffes, gorillas, hippopotamuses, lions, lemurs, orangutans, penguins, rhinoceroses, snow leopards, tigers, and turtles.

Partnership with Toronto Public Library Museum + Arts Pass Program (MAP)

As a venue supporting the MAP Program, Toronto Zoo provides outreach programs at various library branches. This year's program, entitled "Penguins & Polar bears you say!", helped children discover the adaptations these and other aquatic animals use to live in their watery homes. Volunteers also shared an important conservation message about plastic pollution in oceans. Throughout the year, the program was delivered at a variety of libraries, as well as other venues.

Volunteers continue to showcase the Toronto Zoo's work at special events

Every year volunteers use their knowledge and interpretive expertise to connect guests with our conservation messaging at numerous on-site events including major events, such as the Move your Paws for the Polar Bear Cause run and Dream Day in support of SickKids Hospital, and more intimate Learning & Discovery Stations adding value to corporate group bookings.

Wildlife Health Centre interpretive experience continues to engage guests and deliver on our mission

In 2019, volunteers in the Wildlife Health Centre gallery continued to showcase the incredible behind-the-scenes work of our health, nutrition, and reproductive physiology teams to Zoo guests as a free value-added experience. The experience continues to be very well received and 83,364 visitors were reached with our interpretive efforts in 2019.

Conservation messaging related to sustainable palm oil strengthened in 2019

We continued to operate the orangutan hotspot interactive activity zone to help guests understand the importance of the rainforest to orangutans and raise awareness about the issue of sustainability surrounding palm oil. The messaging continued to be well received and was further reinforced at this station with an updated orangutan-friendly shopping guide hand-out to help guests make sustainable shopping choices. The hotspot was operated by volunteers throughout the busy summer and fall months, resulting in the messaging reaching 3,414 guests. We also included sustainable palm oil conservation messaging on our social media channels with a post about sustainable Halloween candy and established new links with Cheyenne Mountain Zoo and Chester Zoo, two leaders in this cause, to further support and help guide our efforts to maximum impact.

Volunteer-led guided tours for Zoo Members a huge success in 2019

Each February, we offer volunteer-led guided tours for Toronto Zoo Members. This year was a smashing success: we booked 60 tours while in past years, we typically booked about 15 tours in the month. We attribute this year's success to the use of member's eblasts to raise awareness, in addition to advertising in our Wild for Life magazine.

Extended corporate/community volunteer activities at the Toronto Zoo

Outside of the activities of the Volunteering & Engagement Unit, the Toronto Zoo also engages corporate and community groups/individuals in various volunteering

opportunities under the larger co-ordination of the Wildlife & Science Division. These activities include tree plantings and harvesting browse cuttings to support the health and nutrition of the animals. Overall, 183 people participated in these activities donating 549 hours of their time.

Performance Measurements:

Table 1: The chart below shows the trend of various volunteer activities from 2015 to 2019.

Toronto Zoo Volunteer Led Programs / Activities	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change vs. 2018
On-Site						
Number of people in groups toured	10,492	13,350	11,718	13,647	13,772	0.9%
Number of groups toured	489	555	476	586	725	23.7%
Off-Site						
Volunteer Led Outreach	40	37	18	16	23	43.8%
a) Schools/Community presentations	22	23	13	11	9	(18.2%)
b) Event Interpretive Tables	18	14	5	5	14	180%
c) Number of people contacted	11,085	6,141	2,426	1,951	4,056	107.9%
Overall						
Total number of volunteer hours	30,963	33,025	29,210	34,106	39,088	14.6%

Notes on Performance Measures:

Off-Site Event Interpretive Tables: We attended more community picnics in 2019, most being hosted by City Councillors, MPP's, and MP's. These large-scale events had higher numbers of attendees resulting in an increase in the number of people contacted at our interpretive tables.

It should also be noted that additional grant funded outreach programs are delivered annually by staff of the Wildlife & Science Division. In 2019, the Adopt-A-Pond program once again reached thousands of individuals across the province, including over 500 people through Citizen Science initiatives, 4,617 at presentations and events, and 47,298 through social media interactions on Facebook and on the Adopt-A-Pond Blog. The Great Lakes Program travelled to schools and festivals from Chatham-Kent to Belleville, returning to previously visited schools and making new connections across Southern Ontario. Throughout 2019, the Great Lakes Program reached over 21,000 students across 17 different School Boards.

Table 2: The table below provides a summary of the extended corporate/community volunteer activities in 2019.

Other Extended Volunteer Activities	Number of Participants	Total number of hours
Corporate Involvement		
RBC – Browse Collection	3	9
Symcor - Tree planting	90	270
Symcor – Meadow planting	90	270
TOTAL	183	549

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