

To: Board of Management

From: Manager, Learning & Engagement

Subject: **2020 VOLUNTEERING & ENGAGEMENT SERVICES REPORT**

Date: 2021-01-27

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 2020. The volunteer team regularly consists of Year-Round Volunteers, Summer Volunteers, Volunteer Hosts, Wildlife Health Centre Volunteers, and Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers. In 2020 however, our Volunteer roster consisted of Year-Round Volunteers only, due to reduced volunteer opportunities and safety concerns as a result of pandemic restrictions. 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 2020, a team of 277 Year-Round Volunteers donated 17,856 hours of their time to the Toronto Zoo reaching an estimated 395,331 people.

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

COMMENTS:

Fifty-three new volunteers were recruited and attended volunteer training courses

Fifty-three people completed the ten-session course initiated in fall 2019 to become Year-Round Volunteers. Recruitment for Summer Information Volunteers, Wildlife Health Centre Volunteers and Volunteer Hosts took place in early 2020 with a total of 68 applicants. In addition, 21 new Zoo Ambassadors were set to begin training in the spring. With the closure of the Zoo on March 13, these volunteer programs were put on hiatus for 2020 due to the uncertainties of what we could offer them as an opportunity and the seasonal nature of these programs. We plan to resume these programs in 2021.

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

In 2020, approximately 34% 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 ensured a safe, high-quality guest experience

To support the re-opening of the Zoo in late June, we altered our traditional interpretive station model so we could continue to provide a high-quality guest experience while managing the constraints of COVID-19. We established interpretive stations along the Scenic Safari Drive-through route, as well as the pedestrian paths. Volunteers were posted at strategic areas where they would be most helpful to guests, such as the Caribou Café Courtyard, and at popular animals such as the Amur tiger and greater one-horned rhino. We also introduced a new interpretive format which we termed “roam zones”, allowing volunteers to circulate in a specified area to maximize opportunities to interact with guests. To ensure their safety, as well as the safety of Zoo guests, volunteers were required to complete COVID-19-specific training before returning to the Zoo site and additional processes were put in place to keep everyone healthy and safe.

Volunteers continued to expand and upgrade their skills

Volunteer monthly meetings moved from in-person sessions to a virtual platform.

2020 presenters included:

Dr. Daryl Mayers, Scientist, Toxicology, Centre of Forensic Sciences
Ms. Kim Stefaniuk, Clinical Pharmacist, Princess Margaret Hospital & TZ Volunteer
Matt Berridge, Wildlife Care (Indo-Malaya Pavilion)
Sarah Stata, Wildlife Care (Indo-Malaya Pavilion)
Brent Huffman, Lead Keeper, Mammals
Kat Lucas, Aqua-Links Program Assistant
Melissa Donnell, Toronto Zoo Bat Conservation Program
Dr. Keriann McGoogan, Planet Madagascar
Denise Hill-Fox, Volunteering & Engagement Coordinator
Taylor Tabobondung, Turtle Island Conservation Program Coordinator
Hollie Ross, Supervisor of Behavioral Husbandry
Claire Dawson, Ocean Wise Science Lead
Isabella Sulpizio, Ocean Wise Accounts Specialist
Dolf DeJong, CEO

In addition, a series of on-site refresher training sessions were delivered during the months of January and February for Year-Round Volunteers. Sessions included: horticulture and greenhouse tours and training, policy reviews, Wildlife Nutrition Centre refresher training, and additional training in biofact handling and interpretation.

After the closure in March, additional relevant skill development and knowledge was fostered through the use of external learning platforms and courses such as San Diego Zoo Global (Animal Welfare), Eppley Institute for Parks and Public Lands (Interpretation), OceanWise, and others.

The use of our volunteer management system was instrumental in expanding our online training capabilities this year. Video recordings of the monthly meetings, Town Halls, and

mandatory training were posted for volunteers unable to participate in the live session. Additional training was delivered through e-modules and included: Toronto Zoo By-Laws, Toronto Zoo Policies, Learning & Engagement Branch Instructions, Toronto Zoo Equity, Diversity & Inclusion presentations, and COVID-related information and procedures.

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

To recognize Volunteer milestones this year, we held a virtual celebration attended by 134 Volunteers. More than 60 Volunteers received recognition awards for their dedicated service to the Zoo. This included 10 Volunteers recognized for 10 years of service, three Volunteers awarded for 15 years of service, two Volunteers reaching 20 years of service, one at 25 years, two at 40 years, and one who reached a remarkable 45 years of service. We also recognized milestones in our hours-of-service program which was introduced to recognize and motivate Volunteers who contribute a significant number of hours over a short period of time, or who show longstanding commitment in our seasonal Volunteer programs. Twenty-two Volunteers earned their 350 hours-of-service award, eight earned awards for 750 hours, seven for 1150 hours, three for 1500 hours, two for 1850 hours, and one Volunteer received an award for 3000 hours of service.

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

Despite the challenges presented by COVID-19, the Zoo managed to recognize many of our valued Volunteers in 2020. During National Volunteer week, April 19-25, we hosted daily Zoom “tea parties” so Volunteer teams could meet virtually to catch up with staff. We also posted daily video messages from our management team to let the Volunteers know we were thinking of them. In October, we held a virtual Volunteer Appreciation event, in place of our annual Strawberries & Wine party, where 62 Volunteers were recognized for their dedicated service to the Zoo. Our annual Winter Holiday Party in December turned into a virtual Volunteer Variety Show with 13 performers, including singers, dancers, poets, and comedians. Additionally, in 2020 nine volunteers were honoured for their service through the annual Ontario Volunteer Service Awards organized by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. Volunteers are kept informed about important Zoo information and events via email and through a new Volunteer blog that was launched in March 2020. They also receive the new staff newsletter “Zoo Connections” twice per month. Finally, Volunteers receive uniforms partially subsidized by the Zoo.

Partnerships with post-secondary institutions continue to help us strengthen our communication of messaging

We continue to partner with Centennial College, University of Toronto, Fleming College, and various other post-secondary institutions on various interpretive projects, including new and updated interpretive signage and materials. In 2020, students gained valuable experience while supporting us with various signage projects through classwork and internships. Toronto Zoo is a sought-after placement location for internships, demonstrating the success of the partnership.

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 2020 for many animals including: giraffe, spider monkey, straw-coloured bat, and zebra.

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

Despite COVID-19, the Zoo hosted a number of special events on-site in 2020, where volunteers were able to use their knowledge and interpretive expertise to connect guests with our conservation messaging. Pre-pandemic events included the Polar Bear Dip and Move Your Paws for the Polar Bear Cause run, which both supported polar bear conservation efforts, as well as a Toronto Zoo career fair, paint nights, and our popular Valentine's Day program. During the pandemic, Volunteers assisted with special events such as the corpse flower extravaganza, Brew at the Zoo, the Boo at the Zoo drive-through, Hay-lloween Town, and the Holiday Marketplace.

Volunteers show dedication in supporting our community partners and projects

During the period when COVID limited on-site volunteer opportunities, volunteers were active in offering a helping hand and support to our community partners. Twelve Volunteers, donating over 260 hours, sewed masks for distribution to patients, visitors, and staff of the Scarborough Health Network. Twenty-two Volunteers donated 139 hours picking and packing food boxes for needy families enrolled in the Second Harvest "Feed our Future" Program. In the fall, 10 Volunteers participated over two weekends supporting the West Rouge Community Association's clean-up of Rouge Beach. Three Volunteers also donated a combined six hours and participated in a fun arts project sponsored by various local arts organizations called the "Toronto Mycelial Network". Showcasing their unique talents, Volunteers drew, painted, or knit some very unique "wild" mushrooms and shared on social media using the #InvisibleNetworkTO.

Volunteer-led guided tours for Zoo Members a huge success in 2020

Each February, we offer volunteer-led guided tours for Toronto Zoo Members. This year was a smashing success: we booked 54 tours and toured 390 individuals. We attribute this year's success to continued use of member's e-blasts to raise awareness, but also word-of-mouth, as many participants were repeat members and referrals.

New guided interpretive offerings for students and families launched

Zoo Expeditionz, fee-based, highly interpretive and interactive private tours of the Zoo's exhibits led by volunteers were created and launched in 2020. They allowed us to offer safe opportunities for students and families to enhance their visit and support out-of-school learning while also generating revenue for the Zoo. The offering launched with positive feedback, with plans to continue in 2021.

Volunteers host Virtual Field Trip chats on TwitchTV

In the fall of 2020, the Toronto Zoo added a new virtual experience through the TorontoZooLife channel on Twitch TV. The experience includes a live stream feed from animal exhibits (giraffe, gorilla, or penguin) and regularly scheduled live chats conducted by both Keepers and Zoo volunteers. Volunteers offer twice daily "field trip" chats to share the Zoo's conservation stories with viewers from all over the world. As of the end of the

year the channel had reached 1 million minutes viewed and is approaching 100,000 unique viewers from around the world.

Several on-going volunteer activities not possible in 2020 due to COVID-19

In 2020, the challenges and precautions related to COVID-19 paused many yearly programs and events that volunteers usually deliver or support. This included our involvement with the Toronto Public Library's Museum + Arts Pass Program, support for the Zoo's Species Awareness Days, and assistance with Zoo Camp. We plan to resume these activities in 2021.

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. Unfortunately, due to the challenges of COVID-19 these activities could not be safely completed in 2020. They are set to continue in 2021, when it is safe to do so.

Performance Measurements:

Table 1: The chart below shows the trend of various volunteer activities from 2016 to 2020.

Toronto Zoo Volunteer Led Programs / Activities	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% change vs. 2019
On-Site						
Number of people in groups toured	13,350	11,718	13,647	13,772	553	(96.0%)
Number of groups toured	555	476	586	725	71	(90.2%)
Off-Site						
Volunteer Led Outreach	37	18	16	23	1	(95.7%)
a) Schools/Community presentations	23	13	11	9	0	(100%)
b) Event Interpretive Tables	14	5	5	14	1	(92.9%)
c) Number of people contacted	6,141	2,426	1,951	4,056	1,552	(61.7%)

Toronto Zoo Volunteer Led Programs / Activities	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% change vs. 2019
Overall						
Total number of volunteer hours	33,025	29,210	34,106	39,088	17,856	(54.3%)

Notes on Performance Measures:

The pandemic had an obvious impact on many of our regular activities related to presenting to large groups, including outreach and guided tours. We were however, still able to connect with many guests in small family groups when the Zoo was open and volunteers on-site still contributed a relatively high number of hours given the constraints.

It should also be noted that additional grant funded outreach programs are delivered annually by staff of the Wildlife & Science Division. In 2020, the Adopt-A-Pond program once again reached thousands of individuals across the province and beyond, including over 500 people through the Turtle Tally and FrogWatch Community Science initiatives, over 50,000 through virtual presentations and events, with an estimated 8,000 interactions through social media on Facebook (both Toronto Zoo and Adopt-A-Pond pages), YouTube, Instagram, and through the Adopt-A-Pond Blog.

The 2020 year began as usual for the Great Lakes Program, with staff travelling to schools and events from Chatham-Kent to Belleville, delivering outreach focusing on the Great Lakes and the aquatic species that call them home. With the closure of all schools in Ontario in March, the Great Lakes Program quickly pivoted to offer programs virtually, reaching 10,000 students in over 30 different school boards. Livestreaming on platforms such as Facebook, YouTube and Instagram resulted in over 83,000 views. Finally, the freshwater mussel reporting and identification app, Clam Counter, received 60 reports of freshwater mussel sightings in 2020 following an annual trend of increasing reports since the app launched in 2017.

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