

Volunteering & Engagement Report 2022

Date: January 25, 2023

To: Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo

From: Senior Director, Strategic Communications & Guest Experience

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report will update the Board of Management on the activities of the Volunteering & Engagement Unit for the year 2022. The volunteer team consists of Year-Round Volunteers, Summer Volunteers, Wildlife Health Centre Volunteers, and Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Senior Director, Strategic Communications & Guest Experience recommends that:

1. The Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo receives this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

There is no decision history available for this item.

COMMENTS

In 2022, Volunteering & Engagement operated our Year-Round, Summer Information, Wildlife Health Centre, and Zoo Ambassador Volunteer programs. All volunteers support the Zoo's educational objectives 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 2022, a team of 251 Year-Round Volunteers, 6 Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers, and 54 seasonal volunteers (30 Summer and 24 Wildlife Health Centre) donated 28,276 hours of their time to the Toronto Zoo reaching an estimated 828,730 people.

One-hundred seven volunteers were recruited and attended volunteer training courses

In 2022 we were finally able to return to our pre-pandemic recruitment and training activities and prospective volunteers jumped at the opportunity! Fifty-three people were recruited and attended training for the Year-Round Volunteer program. In addition, 30 Summer Information Volunteers were trained to assist guests at interpretive stations throughout the Zoo during the busy months of May to August and an additional 24 joined us as part of the Wildlife Health Centre Volunteer program. Recruitment for Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers will resume in 2023 to add to the remaining six students that are still part of the program.

Indoor interpretive stations remodeled with a focus on attracting school visits

Indoor interpretive stations re-opened in the fall after a complete refresh of each of the six stations we offer. From "Fighting Extinction" to "Tigers: The Apex Predator" and much more, fresh, mission-based themes and a wide variety of new interactive and engaging curriculum-linked modules provide a high quality learning experience for both students and families visiting the Zoo. The stations will be promoted to teachers to increase school visits with this value-added learning offering.

Volunteers continued to expand and upgrade their skills

Volunteer monthly meetings provide continuing education and, since April 2020, have been held virtually for health and safety reasons. The added benefit of the virtual format is that we are now able to reach volunteers who were not typically able to attend our in-person presentations prior to the pandemic.

2022 presenters included:

Courtney Leermakers, Wetland Conservation Technician & Christine Drader, First Nations Conservation Technician
Maria Franke, Manager, Welfare Science, Ezekiel Gading, Welfare Research, Sophie deVos, Welfare Research, Jenna Congdon, Welfare Science post-doctoral student & Veronica Ouellette, Nutrition Sciences
Toby Thorne, Native Bat Conservation Program Coordinator, Wildlife Science
Dr. Ashley Marshall and Natalie Santerre, Cheetah Conservation Fund
Dr. Richard Quinn, University of Western Ontario & Docs4GreatApes

Additionally, a series of Town Halls were hosted by CEO, Dolf DeJong, approximately every 8 weeks throughout the year, to keep volunteers informed and engaged and answer their questions.

The use of our volunteer management system was instrumental in expanding our online training capabilities again 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 Animal Welfare Program, Autism Awareness training, Active Threat training, WHMIS training, and updated Zoo Policies.

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

We were able to return to an in-person Volunteer recognition event in June 2022 where close to 60 volunteers received recognition awards for their dedicated service to the Zoo. This included one volunteer awarded for 15 years of service, seven volunteers reaching 20 years of service, three at 25 years, one at 30 years, and one who reached a remarkable 40 years of service! We also recognized milestones in our hours-of-service program, which replaced the years of service awards for any volunteers onboarded after 2010 as a way to provide more frequent recognition of volunteer service. Nineteen Volunteers earned their 350 hours-of-service award, thirteen earned awards for 750 hours, four for 1,150 hours, five for 1,500, and three for 1,850 hours. We also had one exceptional volunteer break the hourly recognition record, achieving 4,500 hours of service over her 11-year (and counting) Zoo volunteer career.

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

We always find meaningful and innovative ways to recognize the incredible contributions of our Volunteer team. During National Volunteer week, April 24-30, we thanked volunteers with a coupon for a coffee and donut from Tim Horton's. In June, we held our Strawberries & Wine volunteer appreciation event, and in December we were able to return to hosting our in-person Holiday Party as a thank you and to kick off the holiday season. Additionally, in 2022 five volunteers were honoured for their service through the annual Ontario Volunteer Service Awards organized by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. One of our volunteers was also nominated and received the Platinum Jubilee Award for Scarborough-Guildwood and another volunteer was nominated and received the John McKay MP Volunteer Appreciation Award. Volunteers are kept continually engaged and informed about important Zoo information and events via email, through our volunteer blog, and through the staff newsletter "Zoo Connections", in addition to our various monthly professional development opportunities. Volunteers also 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 2022, students gained valuable experience while supporting us with various signage and assessment and evaluation projects through classwork and internships. Toronto Zoo is a sought-after placement location for internships, demonstrating the success of the partnership.

Zoo Volunteer animal welfare assessment team continues to support the Welfare Science team

Beginning in 2021, we tapped into the incredible skills and knowledge of our volunteers to formally assist the Wildlife Care & Welfare team with animal welfare assessments. We expanded our team of volunteers that were trained on how to perform these

assessments and they were able to contribute important data to observations and assessments on a variety of species including cheetah, flamingo, white-handed gibbon, western lowland gorilla, and African crested porcupine.

Volunteers integral to the success of Zoo events

With a return to in-person events in 2022, the Zoo relied on our incredible volunteer team to ensure their success. Events ranged from our flagship 10k Oasis ZooRun to the Toronto Zoo Day for the American Association of Zoo Keepers Conference. Volunteers are also a very important ingredient in the success of our internal events and initiatives such as the Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup and the 2022 Toronto Zoo Staff & Volunteer Book Sale.

Volunteers show dedication in supporting our commitment to our community

Volunteers were also active in offering a helping hand to support our community partners and extend our reach into our community. From events like the Love Scarborough Festival and Scarborough Store Front Community Celebration, to community picnics, a tree planting, and even the CNE, our enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers enabled us to bring the wonder of the Zoo out beyond our boundaries.

Guided interpretive offerings for families continued

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 families to enhance their visit in support of the Zoo's mission, while also generating revenue for the Zoo. The offering was continued in 2022 with 65 people (15 families) who participated.

Volunteers host Virtual Field Trip chats on Zoolife.tv

Volunteers continued to provide interactive chats with viewers connecting to the live streams from an expanded array of Toronto Zoo animal exhibits including Indomalaya Turtle World, Komodo dragon, lemur/Aldabra tortoise, orangutan, Amur tiger, giraffe, gorilla, and caribou habitats. Over the year, a team of 12 volunteers contributed 475 hours of presentation time and reached approximately 4,218 viewers. This included 18 school groups, as self-identified in the chat, tuning in as part of their school's virtual learning opportunity. Two additional habitats, Arctic wolves and snow leopard were added at the end of December, and these will be added to the list of live presentations for 2023.

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. This year, in collaboration with Royal Canadian Geographic Society, over 127 corporate volunteers donated 508 hours of their time to plant the first mini forest for the launch of the national Network of Nature Urban Forest Program.

Performance Measurements:

Table 1: The chart below shows the trend of various volunteer activities on-site and off-site and overall volunteer hours for 2018 to 2022.

Toronto Zoo Volunteer Led Programs / Activities	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
On-Site					
Number of people in groups toured	13,647	13,772	553	258	1,270
Number of groups toured	586	725	71	28	49
Off-Site					
Volunteer Led Outreach	16	23	1	1	22
Number of people contacted	1,951	4,056	1,552	403	8,118
Overall					
Total number of volunteer hours	34,106	39,088	17,856	16,733	28,276

Notes on Performance Measures:

Number of people in groups toured/Number of groups toured - In order to better serve more students, our operations have shifted to interpretive stations in place of school tours, where more students can be offered an educational experience.

It should also be noted that additional grant funded outreach programs are delivered annually by staff of the Wildlife & Science Division. --see Learning & Engagement Programs Report 2022.

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SIGNATURE

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