

Learning & Engagement Programs 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 primary activities and achievements of the Learning & Engagement Branch at the Toronto Zoo for 2022. Learning & Engagement oversees a wide variety of programs that support the Strategic Plan. These include school program offerings and teacher resources, a roster of public programs, virtual experiences, and summer camps.

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

2022 was an exciting year as we continued back towards full program operations following the pandemic. We welcomed back many of our programs such as Bats &

Beverages, Wolf Howl, and Serengeti Bush Camp, and were excited to see so many children connect with conservation education through our various camps and programs. Notable in 2022 was the launch of our new school programs, 'EdVentures', which were redesigned to incorporate more student-centred, hands-on activities and inquiry-based learning. We also introduced Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) programming for high achieving secondary students.

We sold a record number of registrations for Zoo Camp and Bush Camp programs, with Zoo Camp being filled in 40 minutes! Through our programs and experiences (combined on-site and live virtual), we reached an estimated 25,970 participants and generated \$1,050,162 in revenue.

Included is a summary of Wildlife & Science outreach programs which are administered by the Conservation Science staff and educational experiences provided by our Guest Experience team.

Key accomplishments in 2022:

**Climate Action Learning & Leadership (CALL) – Award Winning Program
Providing Positive Growth Opportunities for Marginalized Youth**

In 2021, the Learning & Engagement Branch, working with Human Resources and the Wildlife Conservancy, were successful at receiving a federal grant of \$380,527 to implement the Climate Action Learning & Leadership (CALL) Program. This is a unique action-oriented program borne out of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) principles, and involves working closely with various community partners (Woodgreen, Storefront, Native Child & Family Services, Toronto Community Housing). The aim of this program is to engage and inspire youth from traditionally marginalized communities, including low-income neighbourhoods, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) community members, and new Canadians to take action to combat climate change. The goal of this program was to raise awareness of the opportunities and development of employable skills for these youth to find their own calling in the career fields of climate change and conservation science.

In 2022, the CALL Program engaged youth (ages 13 to 16) in a two-week program with 50 participants in four cohorts. Participants attended the Toronto Zoo site, learned from Zoo staff about biodiversity and climate change, and their impacts on wildlife. A key aspect of this program was having the youth work together in small teams under the guidance of Zoo staff to create and deliver action-oriented awareness projects that were delivered on the Zoo site for our guests.

In 2021 the CALL Program was the recipient of the Eleanore Oakes Award for Education Program Design from the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA). In 2022, we received two more awards for this program from the American Association of Zoo Keepers and the Canadian Association of Science Centres (CASC).

The CALL Program, in partnership with the MaRS Discovery District and Innovation Hub, also received a grant from the Mitsubishi Corporation in the amount of \$22,000 to

host a workshop in 2023 with potential partners to develop a roadmap to scale this special program.

Virtual Programs Continue to Connect with and Engage Many School Groups, Families, Community Groups, and Businesses

We continue to engage those who are unable to visit our site through a series of virtual programs that share important messages about conservation and our mission. These include fee-based programs that are offered in a variety of formats.

The Learning & Engagement Branch also delivered free programs to school groups and to families to continue to connect larger audiences to our mission. Many of these programs were delivered in partnership with Exploring by the Seat of Your Pants (EBTSOYP) in collaboration with the University of Toronto Scarborough.

In 2022, the virtual educational opportunities offered by the Zoo were able to offer 288 programs and connect with 15,640 participants, generating \$29,650 in revenue. We've been able to extend our reach to some distant audiences who may not otherwise be able to connect with our stories or visit us in person. As many of our free programs are posted on our social media, they continue to be accessible world-wide and are accumulating views.

Curriculum Connections Made with Students, both Online and In Person

The first half of 2022 was challenging due to the global pandemic and restrictions on school related travel. Despite a late start to in-person learning, the Zoo did see an increase in school attendance onsite. The Learning & Engagement Branch connected with 3,410 students virtually, and 5,608 students in person during 2022. Onsite school programs resulted in nearly \$25,000 in associated revenue.

During the spring months, the Zoo offered EduTrek Tours fully delivered outdoors led by a staff and volunteer walking the Zoo site. Approximately 1,222 elementary students participated in these, resulting in \$4,888 in program revenue.

New primary & junior level tiger presentations were launched in May to tie in with our Year of the Tiger focus and directly linked to the Ontario Science and Technology curriculum. These 45-minute interactive presentations were designed for larger school groups of up to 60 students and were popular with elementary students resulting in 1,356 students participating in 2022.

With the start of the 2022/23 school year, we were excited to launch our new EdVenture programs. These programs were designed to provide a more interactive learning experience, and were designed in a format to accommodate multiple classes per day. These new programs hosted 1,668 students this past fall, generating \$8,375 in program related revenue in addition to the regular admissions revenue.

New onsite programs geared towards secondary students participating in the Specialist High Skills Major program were also offered, providing custom reach ahead experiences to specific sectors of the program. In 2022, two separate events were organized, resulting in 68 students participating and \$1,360 in program revenues.

Promotion of School Programming Opportunities

To maximize the exposure of the educational opportunities available for students, the Learning & Engagement Branch develops and circulates twice during the school year a digital School Programs Brochure (Appendix 1) to all school boards in the GTA and surrounding area.

To ensure we continue to connect with teachers we also produce an e-newsletter, which is circulated to nearly 5,000 educators and highlights the current initiatives of the Zoo as well as educational opportunities for teachers and their students. A sample newsletter has been attached (Appendix 2).

Zoo School - Delivery of Grade 11 Biology Credit Courses

Your Toronto Zoo became established as a private school with the Ontario Ministry of Education and gained the authority to grant credits for the Grade 11 Biology (University Prep) course towards a student's secondary school diploma in 2010. In 2022 Zoo School was offered in a hybrid model format with students spending half of their time on the Zoo site and half of their time learning synchronously with the teacher virtually. A total of 35 students successfully gained their grade 11 University Preparation Biology Credit, resulting in \$64,800 revenue. The new hybrid format was received positively by students and parents – see comments below.

“I so appreciate my daughter being given this amazing opportunity and I believe you both did a fantastic job! I know my daughter enjoyed the course immensely and learned a great deal, and in such a short amount of time! Very impressive!!! I know it will benefit her so much, both in the present and future.”

“The course made biology fun and easy to understand. I feel like the things I learned in one month will stick longer than regular school courses. This biology course is already helping with my current course this semester and its nice to be able to make those connections.”

“I learned a lot during the Evolution project, about what I can do to help and I'll have been making changes in my life. Using less plastic (reusable water bottles, metal straws, etc.), Reducing my carbon footprint, and avoiding palm oil products.”

Conservation and Wildlife Educational Outreach

In addition to the programs delivered through the Learning & Engagement Branch, the Conservation Science Division also coordinates a number of grant funded programs each year through its Species Recovery Branch.

Great Lakes Program

2022 was an exciting and successful year for the Great Lakes Program (GLP). We reached over 14,000 students through in-class virtual presentations delivered in English and French in over 30 different school boards. A new initiative in spring 2022 was the Great Lakes Roadtrip. This livestreamed, multi-day program featured aquatic topics at different stops along the shoreline of all five Great Lakes. To date, the Roadtrip videos have been viewed over 11,000 times on the Zoo's YouTube channel. The GLP team distributed numerous resources including 2,500 activity books in English and 500 in

French, 1,785 brochures, and over 400 pre-loaded USB's which contain all GLP resources in English and French.

Adopt-A-Pond

The Adopt-A-Pond (AAP) Wetland Conservation program reached many individuals across the province and beyond, thanks in large to funding from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation. This funding resulted in the creation of curriculum-linked nature education presentations being delivered to over 35 classrooms, reaching over 650 students. An additional 250 individuals engaged with us through the Turtle Tally and FrogWatch Community Science projects, including 128 new users, who submitted nearly 1,200 frog, toad, and turtle observations in 2022. Information that is collected in this database is submitted to the Natural Heritage Information Centre at the end of each season. The 16th Annual Turtle Tally and FrogWatch Volunteer Appreciation Day was held in November, for the first in-person event since 2019. Adopt-A-Pond also hosted its second Turtle Nesting Workshop for home/landowners in the areas surrounding the Rouge National Urban Park, reaching over 50 households!

AAP distributed 6,357 printed materials to members of the public and these included: 102 books, 2,614 brochures, 2,950 laminated identification guides, and 559 posters, all of which contain excellent information, photos, and graphics of Ontario's reptile and amphibian species, their larvae, and eggs, as well as directions for stewardship actions that can be undertaken by members of the public.

Turtle Island Conservation

In order for Turtle Island Conservation (TIC) to best serve the needs of Indigenous communities, we needed to know what ways TIC can best provide resources and support. It was decided that a Virtual Indigenous Community Survey would be created and then shared with 29 Indigenous organizations or communities. In February 2022, the confidential survey was initiated with thirty-five participants completing it.

In February, TIC hosted an on-site event for Indigenous youth in partnership with Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST). The youth would join TIC staff and an Elder in a winter trail walk throughout the Tundra Trek at the Zoo. This event fostered a connection to the land, both from an Indigenous and western science perspective.

TIC then partnered with GLP in March for the "GLP and TIC Present: The [Great] Lakes Roadtrip 2022." Staff from both programs visited three First Nation communities and one GLP partner, filmed live and pre-recorded videos to be distributed to schools and Indigenous individuals across Ontario. This project was also posted on Toronto Zoo's YouTube channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcdN2uOqc-3M-SM3FUE8sckm4OUiABJZJ>.

TIC was also awarded \$6,700 from TD Friends of the Environment Fund to develop the project "Shedding Light on Reptiles: Two-Eyed Seeing Stewardship Workshops". This project partners with three First Nation communities from the Peterborough region to host two workshops – one focused on building a turtle nesting beach and the other on snake hibernaculum which will take place on Hiawatha First Nation territory in spring of 2023. In addition, TIC is working with local First Nation communities to develop a

ceremony hosted at Toronto Zoo in 2023, to distribute bald eagle feathers back to these communities.

Native Bat Conservation Program

In 2022 the Native Bat Conservation Program (NBCP) received grant funding to expand the Community Science Pilot Project across Southern Ontario. This program was designed to engage community scientists in conservation work to learn about bat species in Ontario, while also allowing us to collect useful distribution data about species at risk. Volunteers signed up for different periods throughout the summer to place an acoustic recorder on their property to identify bat activity. Acoustic data was analyzed during the summer and volunteers were given personalized reports within two weeks of their data collection, which allowed them to learn about the species that were found on their property. We conducted several virtual and in person volunteer appreciation events where participants could learn more about bats and how their monitoring efforts contributed to understanding the distribution of four species at risk. In the pilot year of our project a total of 15 volunteers were engaged and 18 monitoring sites were sampled over a period of 116 nights recording over 26,000 bat observations. In only the second year of our project we grew this number to 94 volunteers sampling 102 monitoring sites over a period of 408 nights recording almost 120,000 bat observations! We have achieved our goal of developing a successful community science project that informs the public about bats while collecting useable scientific data. We managed to collect data for a large geographic area and recorded all eight bat species found in Ontario. This year our partnership with the Nuclear Management Waste Organization (NWMO) and the Métis Nation of Ontario was highlighted at the 2022 United Nations Biodiversity Conference (COP15) as seen here <https://www.torontozoo.com/mediaroom/press2022/20221214>.

Zoo Camp returns to full capacity and sees unprecedented demand

In 2022, Zoo Camp attracted 1,714 campers over 9 weeks and generated \$588,746 in revenue. We were thrilled to be able to return to our full Zoo Camp capacity, offering week-long experiences for children ages 4-16, while remaining mindful of COVID related safety measures for both staff and campers.

Serengeti Bush Camp overnight program re-opens as a popular and unique offering for guests

After two seasons of being on hold due to COVID-19 restrictions, Serengeti Bush Camp reopened this past summer with overwhelming support and success. Despite a shortened operating season in 2022 due to ongoing concerns surrounding COVID and staffing challenges a total of 2,276 participants (families & youth groups) attended the program, generating \$242,905 in revenue.

Special day-programs for children returned throughout the year in 2022

Several day camps were once again offered to provide childcare opportunities for parents and memorable experiences for young campers. Our 'Cool Cats' themed March Break Camp was offered in a limited capacity, due to ongoing COVID restrictions, for 14 campers aged 4-6. This camp focused on the wild cats of the Zoo in celebration of 2022 being the Year of the Tiger. In addition, two 'Big Day Off' camps were offered in the month of November on PA days with a total of 40 campers attending. A Holiday Drop & Shop was delivered for 16 children (ages 4-10) on Saturday December 10th providing a

unique opportunity for parents to run holiday errands knowing their children were participating in a fun and safe educational experience. In addition, Parent & Tot programs returned in late 2022 with one-hundred and forty-eight participants enjoying this free-play/exploration focused program which allows parents and their preschooler to interact with a variety of themed play stations in our child friendly Canopy Classroom. All together, these children's programs generated revenue of \$9,425 in 2022.

Multiple interactive educational events engaged curious guests throughout 2022

Learning & Engagement continued our history of collaboration with our conservation teams at the Zoo to provide wildlife-specific interactive presentations for Zoo guests of all ages. Two evenings of 'Zoo After Dark: Bats & Beverages' programming were delivered for a sold-out audience of 88 guests. This popular program is a licensed adults only event that allows participants to enjoy an evening outdoors. Participants were provided with bat detectors to listen for free-flying native bats on the Zoo site and then enjoyed an interactive presentation with our resident bat expert Toby Thorne. A family-oriented program, 'Zoo After Dark: An Evening with Native Bats', was also delivered leveraging the expertise of our Zoo bat researchers in addition to a presentation by two of Canada's leading bat experts, Dr. Brock Fenton and Dr. Paul Faure. This event was another sellout with 99 participants in attendance. In combination, these bat focused events generated \$4,385 in revenue.

Leading up to Halloween, staff delivered two 'Bump in the Night: Wolf Howl' programs for families to a sold-out audience of 100 guests each night, generating \$3,649 in revenue.

In collaboration with the Lead Keeper for Reptiles & Amphibians and the Adopt-a-Pond team 'Getting to Know the Massasauga Rattlesnake' was delivered to 40 program participants which included an informative presentation on the diversity of Ontario's native snakes, interactive opportunities with several non-venomous native snakes, and a demonstration with the Massasauga rattlesnake and timber rattlesnake, a species extirpated in Ontario.

Wild Encounters and VIP Tours

Our Guest Experience team also delivers personalized tours offered through the Wild Encounter (WE) and VIP Tour programs which allow for a close connection between our guests and our animals. Wild Encounter tours, first initiated in 2019, involve a 30–60 minute walking tour that provide small groups of 6-8 people an up-close experience in one of our accessible behind-the-scenes areas where the Zoo's conservation initiatives are highlighted. In 2022, 4,620 guests attended Wild Encounters generating \$251,225 in revenue. Survey results show engaged and positive reviews for the programming and staff providing the tours. New for 2022, Special Event Wild Encounters were added as a new encounter that guests could book when celebrating birthdays, gender reveals, or any other events. From August to December, 20 Special Event Wild Encounters were delivered resulting in revenue of \$4,200.

The VIP tour program was a new experience first added in July 2021. This unique experience provides a personalized tour guide for up to five hours to escort 2-6 guests via golf cart on their own customized tour featuring behind-the-scenes, private animal

experiences, and a sit-down lunch. Through these experiences guests gain a deeper understanding of our Zoo's mission and important conservation work leaving many inspired to do their part to help ensure a healthy planet and environment for the future. 69 tours were delivered for 258 guests generating \$76,024 in revenue.

2022 was a very positive year where we were able to welcome back many of our program participants and provide many positive and memorable learning experiences. We look forward to 2023 where we can continue to expand our program offerings and engage with more guests to share important wildlife and conservation messages.

CONTACT

Heather House
Manager, Learning & Engagement
hhouse@torontozoo.ca
416-392-5937

Steve Jones
Supervisor, Learning & Engagement
sjones@torontozoo.ca
416-393-6376

SIGNATURE

Jennifer Tracey
Senior Director, Strategic Communications & Guest Experience

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1 – School Programs Brochure (2022)
Attachment 2 – Sample E-Newsletter – Educators' Edition (January 2022)
Attachment 3 – Learning & Engagement Programs 2018-2022