

Volunteering & Engagement Report 2023

Date: January 16, 2024

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 2023. 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 2023, Volunteering & Engagement operated our Year-Round, Summer Information, Wildlife Health Centre, and Zoo Ambassador Volunteer programs. Zoo volunteers are champions for conservation, engaging with guests to deliver the Zoo's mission, inspire a passion for wildlife, and ensure a high quality guest experience. In 2023, a team of 257

Year-Round Volunteers, 46 Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers, and 47 seasonal volunteers (28 Summer and 19 Wildlife Health Centre) donated 39,932 hours of their time to the Toronto Zoo reaching an estimated 1,149,329 people.

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

In 2023 we once again saw a great response to our recruitment campaigns. Twenty-eight people were recruited and attended training for the Year-Round Volunteer program. In addition, 17 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 21 joined us as part of the Wildlife Health Centre Volunteer program. Recruitment for Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers was also very well received, with 43 high school students joining our active roster in that category.

New interpretive stations created in African Rainforest and New Outdoor Orangutan Habitat - Orangutans of Gunung Leuser

Continuing on our refresh of interpretive stations from 2022, two new interpretive stations were added in the African Rainforest Pavilion to help guests learn more about lemurs, chameleons, meerkats, and the many other animals that call that area home. Two interpretive stations also debuted with the opening of the Orangutans of Gunung Leuser outdoor orangutan habitat, to help activate guests with conservation messaging on palm oil and orangutans. All of our interpretive stations are also promoted to teachers to support self-guided school visits with this value-added learning offering.

Volunteers continued to expand and upgrade their skills

Volunteer monthly meetings provide continuing education for volunteers to ensure they have the most current animal and organizational information to provide a high quality guest experience.

2023 presenters included:

Lindsay Paats, Wildlife Care - highlights of her trip to Churchill, MB, and updates on the status of polar bears in the wild, as well as the polar bears that live at Toronto Zoo.

Vicki Hardstaff, Wildlife Science - the process of moving animals across the Zoo or from one Zoo to another.

Terrance Fleming, Deputy Director of the Red Panda Network - provided an overview of the status of red pandas in the wild, and conservation efforts in the field.

Stacy Strother, Program Communications Manager, International Rhino Foundation - overview of the status of rhino populations in the wild, and conservation work in the field.

Greg Bridgett, Learning & Engagement Coordinator - shared stories from his trip to Madagascar to participate in a rapid survey of endangered lemurs in Ankarafantsika National Park.

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: KultureCity Sensory Inclusive Program Training and several updated Zoo Policies.

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

We held our annual volunteer recognition event in June 2023 where close to 60 volunteers received recognition awards for their dedicated service to the Zoo. This included three volunteers awarded for 15 years of service and one at 30 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. Twenty-one Volunteers earned their 350 hours-of-service award, twelve earned awards for 750 hours, nine for 1,150 hours, five for 1,500, and five for 1,850 hours. We also had one volunteer reach 2,250 hours of service, one attain 2,600 hours of service, and one exceptional volunteer break the hourly recognition record for the second year in a row, achieving 5,350 hours of service over her 12-year (and counting) Zoo volunteer career.

Your 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 16-22, we thanked volunteers with coffee and goodies at the start of their shift. In June, we held our Strawberries & Wine volunteer appreciation event, and in December we hosted our annual Holiday Party as a thank you and to kick off the holiday season. One of our volunteers was also nominated and received the MP John McKay Annual 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 2023, students gained valuable experience while supporting us with various projects including assessment and evaluation, the creation of interpretive modules, and the management of our natural history collection through classwork and internships. Toronto Zoo is a sought-after placement location for internships, demonstrating the success of the partnerships.

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. This year Volunteers were able to contribute important data to observations and assessments on a variety of species including babirusa, hyena, macaw, orangutan, southern ground hornbill, and Western lowland gorilla.

Volunteers integral to the success of Zoo events

The Zoo continues to draw on our incredible volunteer team to ensure the success of events, both large and small. Events ranged from our flagship 10k Oasis ZooRun to the Love at the Zoo Valentine's Day program. Volunteers are also a very important ingredient in the success of our internal initiatives such as the CALL (Climate Action Learning & Leadership) program and the Toronto Police Service 42 Division empowerment workshops for young women hosted by the Zoo in 2023.

Volunteers show dedication in supporting our commitment to our community

Our enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers also enabled us to bring the wonder of the Zoo out beyond our boundaries through on- and off-site community and corporate events. In 2023, volunteers contacted an estimated 13,441 people through participating in dozens of events including the CNE, Downsview Park Earth Day Celebrations, Scarborough Folk Fest, community picnics, on-site Learning & Discovery tables, and much more. 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 2023.

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 the Amur tiger, African straw-coloured fruit bat, Arctic wolf, caribou, giraffe, gorilla, Indomalaya Turtle World, Komodo dragon, lemur/Aldabra tortoise, orangutan, and snow leopard habitats. Over the year, a team of 12 volunteers contributed 952 hours of presentation time and reached approximately 6,261 viewers.

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, 220 Symcor employees and their families donated funds to purchase young tree saplings and collectively gave 660 hours of their time to plant a mini forest.

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SIGNATURE

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