



Sunset Zoo Education Plan

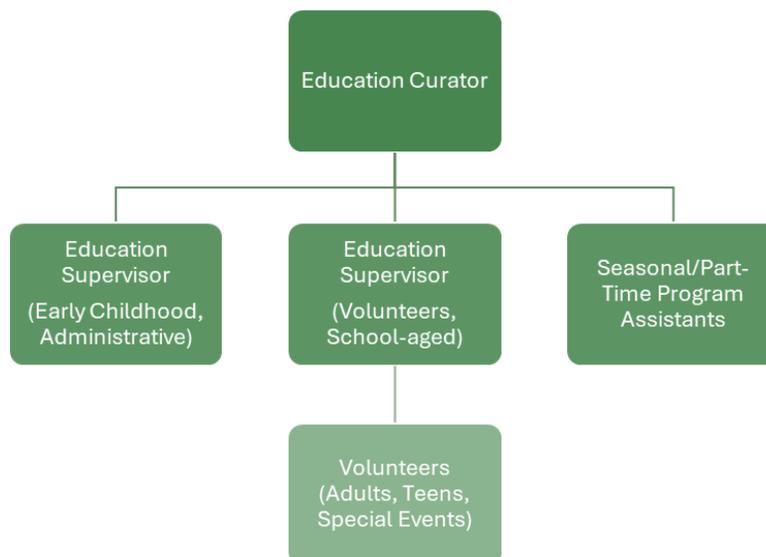
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The mission of the Sunset Zoo is *To Inspire Conservation of the Natural World*. Educational programs build connections between wildlife, wild places, and our audiences. These connections are crucial to deepening the sense of stewardship that all humans should feel for the natural world. The Sunset Zoo's Education Department supports this mission by providing memorable, scientifically focused programs to our community, locally and beyond.

Organizational Structure

The Education Department consists of three full-time staff members, up to 20 seasonal or part-time staff, and a team of dedicated volunteers. Each role is integral to achieving the department's mission and contributes to its success. While a designated hierarchy provides structure, all team members are encouraged to support one another and step in to fulfill roles they oversee when needed. Fostering a culture of teamwork, equity, and collaboration is a top priority, ensuring the department operates effectively and inclusively.

- **Education Curator** — oversees the entire Education Department including strategic planning, curriculum development, ambassador animal collection planning and management, staff development, etc.
- **Education Supervisors** — while each supervisor has specialty focuses, both write curriculum, support the curator in staff management, teaching programming, etc.
- **Seasonal/Program Assistants** — facilitates educational programming such as birthdays, camps, and overnights.
- **Volunteers** — volunteers support husbandry, interpretation, and special events



Sunset Zoo Conservation Values

Learning – We believe in creating opportunities for all to learn about wildlife, the conservation of them, and what each of us can do to help.

Sustainability – We believe conservation is only possible by practicing sustainability. This will ensure needed resources are available for humans and non-human animals to thrive now and into the future.

Community – Community engagement drives enhanced conservation impact, and we strive to be active community partners to further everyone’s efforts.

Biodiversity – We strive to support the genetic and species diversity of animals in human care and those in their natural habitats using the most up-to-date scientific understanding to ensure sustainable population.

Action – We believe humans have a direct responsibility to the conservation of wildlife and wild places. Thus, conservation action is at the core of everything we do at the Sunset Zoo.

Education Department Mission Statement

To inspire a sense of wonder and stewardship for the natural world by creating memorable experiences that connect guests to wildlife and wild places.

Education Department Vision Statement

Creating a future where people are empowered to protect, advocate for, and preserve the natural world.

Conservation Education Messaging

The Sunset Zoo’s Education Department utilizes conservation education messages to explain the plight that species face in the wild, build an understanding of science concepts, and inspire individuals to become better stewards for the environment. The messages below are utilized to guide education objectives and goals, develop curriculum, and share messaging both on Zoo grounds and throughout our community.

- **Wildlife and wild places are in peril, and your actions matter.**
Humans are the primary drivers of disruption in the natural world. Our actions have caused habitat destruction, accelerated climate change, widespread pollution, and intense competition for dwindling natural resources. These impacts have compounded, making wild places uninhabitable and pushing many species beyond their ability to adapt. However, by making conscious choices—such as reducing consumption—we can ease our burden on the planet and help protect its future.
- **Learning about the natural world fosters empathy for all living beings within it.**
Helping individuals understand the interconnectedness of life cultivates a sense of stewardship for our planet. Zoos offer unique, immersive opportunities to explore the natural world and observe wildlife up close, igniting curiosity and fostering meaningful connections that inspire conservation action.

- **The Sunset Zoo is a conservation organization dedicated to championing the protection of species.** Wildlife and wild places are disappearing. AZA-accredited organizations, like the Sunset Zoo, are taking action to combat extinction by educating the public, thoughtfully participating in Species Survival Plans, and financially supporting researchers and conservation initiatives. This multifaceted approach aims to create a world where wildlife not only survives but thrives.

Educational Outcomes

Every educational interaction, no matter how brief, should be purposeful. Whether we are conversing with guests in passing on Zoo grounds, interacting with a volunteer, or teaching in the community, each of our programs should support one or more of the following outcomes:

- **Knowledge Gain**—Individuals will have an increased understanding of science concepts, such as ecology, animal care, and conservation.
- **Fostering Empathy**—Individuals will understand their role in the ecosystem and feel connected to the natural world.
- **Behavior Change**—Individuals will feel empowered to make choices and take actions that positively impact our planet.
- **Making Memories**— Individuals will look back on their memories of Sunset Zoo with fondness, cherishing the fun and engaging experiences they enjoyed.

Current Programming

Type of Program	Intended Audience	Program Description	Desired Outcome
Summer and Day Camps	K-5 th Grade	Participants attend day or weeklong camps between the hours of 7:30am-5:30pm. Staff facilitate themed lessons, crafts, activities, Zoo excursions, nature play, ambassador presentations, and enrichment creation. When appropriate, campers may have special experiences such as behind-the-scenes encounters or chats with expert staff.	Knowledge Gain Fostering Empathy Behavior Change Making Memories
Zoo Ambassador Programs (ZAPs)	K-5 th Grade General Audience Seniors	Staff facilitate science-themed curriculum that supports state science standards when appropriate.	Knowledge Gain Fostering Empathy Making Memories
Behind-the-Scenes (BTS) Tours	General Audience	Staff tour participants through the Zoo and to BTS areas, such as the vet hospital and the keeper center.	Knowledge Gain Fostering Empathy Making Memories
VIP Encounters	General Audience	Participants are guided on a short tour of the Zoo on the way to their curated experience.	Knowledge Gain Fostering Empathy

		Encounters offer safe, meaningful, and appropriate interactions with Zoo residents.	Making Memories
Birthday Parties	General Audience	Family and friends gather together in celebration. Party includes ambassador presentations, painting demonstration, access to a party host, and admission into the Zoo.	Making Memories
Zoofari Tales	Early Childhood	In partnership with the Manhattan Library, Zoo staff bring biofacts and ambassador animals that support the program theme.	Making Memories
Volunteers	Adults	<p>Husbandry aides support animal ambassador care under the direction of trained caretaker staff.</p> <p>Docents interpret on Zoo grounds at an exhibit of their choice and support animal awareness days.</p> <p>Special event volunteers support Spooktacular, animal awareness days</p>	<p>Knowledge Gain</p> <p>Fostering Empathy</p> <p>Behavior Change</p> <p>Making Memories</p>
Conservation Crew	10-13 year olds	A summer program in which participants learned about themed science topics, such as the disruption of ecosystems, and engaged in conservation action, such as removing invasive species or doing waste audits.	<p>Knowledge Gain</p> <p>Fostering Empathy</p> <p>Behavior Change</p> <p>Making Memories</p>
Junior Zookeeper	10-13 year olds	A summer program in which participants learned husbandry skills under the supervision of education staff.	<p>Knowledge Gain</p> <p>Making Memories</p>
Zoo Teens	Middle and High School	Participants supported husbandry, pop up interpretive interactions, and education programs throughout the year.	<p>Knowledge Gain</p> <p>Fostering Empathy</p> <p>Behavior Change</p> <p>Making Memories</p>
Zoo Crew	Middle and High School	An afterschool program in which participants learned husbandry skills under the supervision of education staff.	<p>Knowledge Gain</p> <p>Making Memories</p>
Painting with the Animals	General Audience	Participants visit a different exhibit each session and are encouraged to use their observation skills to paint the species. Staff share information about our animals and their wild counterparts.	<p>Knowledge Gain</p> <p>Fostering Empathy</p> <p>Making Memories</p>

****Tabled for review as of Fall 2024. New programming coming in 2025****