



# Saint Louis Zoo Education Overview



Saint Louis Zoo  
Animals Always®



**Our Mission:** Working in partnership with local and global communities, we provide educational opportunities and experiences that nurture compassion for animals and our shared world in order to empower conservation action.

## Building Upon a Legacy of Excellence

### Who We Are:

The Saint Louis Zoo has one of the nation's largest Zoo-based Education Departments. It was established more than 50 years ago to link visitors of every age and background to the Zoo's care for animals and conservation work, not only by providing excellent materials and presentations, but also by creating meaningful experiences.

The Education Department connects the Zoo's conservation efforts in the field to the work we do on our 90-acre campus in protecting and providing quality care for our 17,000 animals. The Zoo is home to 588 species, many of them rare and endangered. It is one of the few free zoos in the nation and, with more than 3 million annual visitors, it is among the most popular. The Saint Louis Zoo was voted America's Top Free Attraction and Best Zoo in USA Today's 10Best Readers' Choice Awards.

At the Zoo, we know that discovering the wonder of nature leads us on the path to stewardship of our planet. Rich with real-world phenomena, the Zoo offers a place where people can pursue and develop their interest in science, engage in science inquiry, practice conservation actions, and reflect on their experience through discussion with a range of people—from volunteers to educators to keepers to scientific experts.

As educators, our commitment is not only to recognize and adapt to the various ways people learn, but also to create a new paradigm of conservation education that connects people of all ages and backgrounds to nature. That's a tall order, but ours is a highly qualified staff, offering over 317 combined years of experience in teaching, research and work with animals. This averages out to more than 16 years' experience for each Education Department employee. All of the full-time and part-time year-round educators in the department hold university degrees, including 10 in the department with graduate degrees.

### What We Do:

To help visitors feel more connected to nature and motivate everyone to take action to preserve the natural world. We offer hundreds of programs and typically reach more than 1.7 million visitors each year. We reach people through on-site programs, tours, outreach, distance learning, and a range of events, experiences and contacts with our volunteer and paid staff.

# Programs for All Ages and Abilities

## Early Childhood:

Programs for children 4 months to 8 years are offered in a variety of formats for young children and their caregivers. Families enjoy programs year-round that include live animals, songs, stories, hands-on experiments and more. Families and school groups can also visit the Wind Wonder Outpost discovery room program. This is a child-directed program where children and their caregivers can explore the natural world together. There are areas for dramatic play where children can transform into an owl or octopus. Or they can discover what a butterfly wing looks like up close, or how bear fur feels. Other popular areas include a miniature Zoo building and a zoo career corner where children can practice being a vet, keeper and more. During the summer, Camp Joey offers a week of animal fun for 4- and 5-year-old campers. Our most impactful program is The Saint Louis Zoo Preschool. Children 3 to 5 years of age investigate the wonders of the natural world in this half-day program. Children are enrolled in the preschool for two full years.

## Youth and Teens:

We provide a huge variety of exciting summer classes and camps for youth. Class topics range from Fantastic Felines to Grossology 101 to Photography at the Zoo. Class lengths vary from an hour to multiple days. Our summer day camps, Camp KangaZoo and Teen Camp, feature four exciting days of hands-on activities and guided Zoo tours, followed by an overnight at the Zoo. KangaCare and Friday extension programs help meet the needs of working parents, and our financial scholarship program makes camp accessible to all.

## Families:

Meet animals up close in a Family Animal Encounter, or sleep under the sea lion viewing tunnel or under the stars at a Wild Nights family overnight. Our Animal Adventure Birthday Party packages include live animal contact and a variety of fun and educational activities.



## Youth Groups:

We offer a range of opportunities for individual youth, homeschool, scouts and other organized youth groups. Scouts can learn about animals and work toward fulfilling badge requirements in daytime, after-school, and evening programs or during a Snooze at the Zoo overnight. Homeschoolers can register for individual or monthly classes to explore the world of science through animals and nature.

## School Groups:

Tens of thousands of schoolchildren attend classroom presentations, Zoo tours, overnights, after-school and outreach programs every year. These programs are aligned with Missouri Learning Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. Programs can be customized to meet specific school needs, ranging from one day to multiple visits.



## Outreach:

Through our outreach initiatives, we provide programming for everyone – from age 2 to 102. We visit schools, libraries, senior groups, scout groups and a range of community organizations. Live animals may be part of the program, depending upon weather conditions and location parameters.

## Distance Learning:

The Zoo's Distance Learning Studio, opened in 2014, enabled the Education Department to increase the number of instructional and informative programs available to students in the United States – and around the world – through the use of innovative technology. Made possible through the generosity of The Tilles Foundation, this studio allows educators to expand learning opportunities about the Zoo, its animals and the conservation work it does. Schools, universities and organizations from across the globe routinely take students to the Zoo without leaving their classrooms, offices or conference areas. The Zoo brings live, interactive, engaging video-conferenced programs directly to your location through the magic of technology.

## Adult Programs and Lectures:

Adult programs include breakfast and evening tours, dinners, wine and cheese events, overnights, and presentations. In partnership with the Academy of Science-St. Louis, the Zoo



offers lectures delivered by a range of experts from nationally and internationally known academic, conservation and scientific organizations. These discussions cover timely topics ranging from the challenges scientists face as they discover solutions to conservation issues, to the plight of endangered animals and initiatives to preserve those animals and their habitats.

### Education Inclusion:

Today, people with disabilities represent the largest minority group in our country, comprising upwards of 56 million Americans. To better meet the needs of these

individuals and their families, a full-time Education Inclusion Specialist joined the Education team in 2017. Inclusive education means all participants are welcomed and supported to learn, contribute and participate in all aspects of the life of the Zoo. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. This is accomplished working closely with families and staff to create the most successful experience for each child during Zoo visits and programs.

## Resources at the Zoo

### Resources for Teachers:

Our partnerships with area teachers support broader conservation education, which strengthens our community. The Zoo provides materials for check-out, web-based resources and teacher professional development. Check-out materials available in the Library and Teacher Resource Center include: hands-on kits, curriculum guides, DVDs and activity books. Web-based resources include web-cams, video clips and classroom activities. Teacher workshops provide training in science inquiry, conservation education, zoological content and instructional practices. In these sessions, educators also learn to use the Zoo as an educational resource and natural history as curricular platform. These help educators integrate conservation education into their classroom curricula.

### Dedicated Volunteers:

**Docents:** Our 200 education volunteers (docents) are highly trained and dedicated to teaching schoolchildren and the general public about wildlife, ecosystems and conservation. In sharing their knowledge and enthusiasm about our Zoo,



they help increase our visitors' caring attitude toward nature. Docents are also active members of partner organizations such as the Association for Zoo and Aquarium Docents and Volunteers and the St. Louis Metropolitan Docent Council. They also serve on various boards and committees here at the Zoo.

**Zoo ALIVE Teens:** Teens who like animals and children and are passionate about wildlife and conservation can also volunteer through Zoo ALIVE—the Zoo’s volunteer educator program for high school students. Zoo ALIVE Teen Volunteers help deliver weekend education programs; lead visitor educational activities at events; and assist at birthday parties, Stingrays at Caribbean Cove and summer camps and with outreach. As the designers and voices of the #byetobags campaign, its team members continuously shape the campaign while educating the public about the benefits of switching to reusable bags. They also have opportunities to help our Animal Division team by mulching habitats, caring for invertebrates and more. In addition, they can opt to participate in hikes and camping trips and occasionally help with the Zoo’s conservation programs.

### **Animal Artifact Collection:**

The Saint Louis Zoo’s Education Department manages an extensive diverse Biofact Collection (animal artifact collection). The collection consists of over 2,500 objects such as skulls, skeletal, pelts, feathers and other items. This collection is used daily in our programs as an interactive and hands-on teaching tool to enhance the learning experience.

### **Interpretation on Zoo Grounds:**

Zoo guests often encounter Professor Whachawanano, Dr. Askaway, or Dr. G. Raffe of our Theatrical Interpreter Program. This program has grown over the last decade from one full-time interpreter to one full-time, one part-time, and more than two dozen seasonal interpreters who are certified by the National Association of Interpretation. This fun group can be seen on Zoo grounds seven days a week, either working in the Stingrays at Caribbean Cove exhibit or engaging visitors in entertaining learning experiences at our animal habitats.

## Leading the Way in Science and Conservation Education

### **Milkweed for Monarchs:**

Through a partnership with the City of St. Louis and the Missouri Botanical Garden, the Zoo worked to help connect City residents and urban nature with the Milkweed for Monarchs project. This initiative led to over 50 established monarch-friendly gardens around the city at public and private schools. In addition, the collaboration led to the creation of a Teacher Monarch Garden Resource guide for educators.

### **Conservation Education Research:**

To maintain our status as one of the leading wildlife educational institutions in the world, we are constantly engaged in research and development. Our research efforts are intended to integrate pedagogy, ecology, zoology, sociology and anthropology into our programs. Current efforts include research on the topic of affective transformation, a concept coined by Jeffrey P. Bonner, Ph.D.,



Interpreters also support special evening events and provide multiple programs that include breakfast and evening tours, Daily Safari Tours, and the popular Day with the Rays and Advanced Day with the Rays children’s program. They also offer storytelling at Boo at the Zoo and Wild Lights.

### **Conservation Education Liaison Program:**

The Zoo’s Conservation Education Liaisons work in close partnership with the Zoo’s Animal Division Department to effectively support Education programs and interpretation. In turn, liaisons also support Animal Division in their education initiatives. As an example, liaisons assist the Zoo’s Institute for Conservation Medicine in their outreach efforts to the St. Louis community, specifically with the St. Louis Box Turtle Project. The collaboration allows the liaisons to develop STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) programming for the students, and it has expanded the project’s reach from 200 students to over 1,000 St. Louis area students who go into Forest Park and track box turtles alongside Zoo scientists.

Dana Brown President and CEO at the Saint Louis Zoo, to express a connection that goes beyond understanding of nature and connects humans in a deeper level with nature. Our commitment to research and development makes our program an important reference source for other zoo, aquarium and museum education programs in the U.S. and in the world, and allows the Saint Louis Zoo to point the way forward in conservation education.

### **Citizen Scientists:**

The Saint Louis Zoo supports national and local Citizen Science initiatives like FrogWatch USA™, a national long-term citizen science monitoring program for frogs and toads. We also support local citizen science by leading, staffing and participating in Bioblitz opportunities, which are family-friendly expeditions in St. Louis that explore different habitats. We also help to establish and collaborate on new citizen science projects such Turtle Road Watch.

# MILESTONES

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- In February 2017, the Zoo ALIVE teen volunteers and the #byetobags campaign hosted the first Youth Ocean Conservation Summit in the Midwest. The event gathered 130 Midwestern teens from St. Louis, Chicago, Kansas City and more. The summit aimed to equip young students with the skills to create and sustain conservation projects.
- In 2002, a National Science Foundation funded project, Center for Teaching and Learning (CISTL) began. It was a partnership with Washington University, the Missouri Botanical Garden, Saint Louis Science Center, University of Missouri-St. Louis, St. Louis Community College and University City School District. CISTL focused on improving science teaching and learning through teacher professional development, mentoring and coaching and research.
- The Saint Louis Zoo has received the Center for Interactive Learning and Collaboration's Pinnacle Award, Honorable Mention, for three years in a row.
- Via the generosity of The Tilles Foundation, a new distance learning studio was constructed, dedicated to the continuation of providing quality programs to children around the world.
- A Saint Louis Zoo representative serves on the National Association for Interpretation's Standards Committee with the purpose of working across disciplines in interpretation to establish best practices, knowledge, skills and abilities for the industry.
- The Saint Louis Zoo has worked with The New England Aquarium's National Network of Ocean and Climate Change Interpretation to train staff and volunteers to have a common voice in working towards climate change solutions. This program was funded through the National Science Foundation and included partnerships with The Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, The FrameWorks Institute and other zoos, aquariums, nature centers and professional scientists.
- Saint Louis Zoo Education and Audience Research staff participated in the Zoo and Aquarium Action Research Collaborative along with five other Association of Zoos and Aquariums institutions as part of a National Science Foundation (NSF) grant. Over the course of the three-year (2012-2014) project, researchers carried out multiple related research projects designed to contribute to an understanding of "engagement" in zoos and aquariums.



- These researchers studied engagement levels of Zoo Education program participants and general public Zoo visitors while visiting various Zoo exhibits and while participating in a facilitated activity designed to engage them in close observations of animal behavior. The project led researchers to support their hypothesis that a staff-facilitated activity can significantly increase visitor engagement at Zoo exhibits.
- In November 2016, in partnership with San Diego Zoo Kids, the Saint Louis Zoo launched "Zoo TV" at St. Louis Children's Hospital. This 24/7, commercial-free TV channel allows pediatric patients and their families to enjoy animal stories from zoos around the nation, including our own Zoo! We also share our stories with other pediatric hospitals around the nation. We are currently exploring options to bring this opportunity to other pediatric hospitals in the greater St. Louis area.
  - The Saint Louis Zoo partners with Saint Louis University (SLU) scientists on the TRTLE project – Teaching Research through Turtle Life-History and Ecophysiology. This NSF-funded study allows eight of our Zoo ALIVE teens per year to participate in laboratory and field research at SLU.
  - The Saint Louis Zoo's Education Department has partnered with several Alaska Native communities that live and interact with polar bears in northwest coastal Alaska. Through this partnership, the Zoo provides educational resources, programming and capacity-building opportunities to students in the communities. Because Alaska Native communities have extensive, direct, and relevant experience with polar bears and the impacts of a changing climate, the communities also have the opportunity to connect with our visitors via first-person video at McDonnell Polar Bear Point.

# OUR PARTNERS

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Our staff provides educational value to the greater conservation community through more than 180 worldwide partnerships with universities, governmental agencies and conservation organizations. These partnerships result in presentations at conferences and meetings, as well as articles in academic and scientific journals, reports and publications.

The Zoo has received financial support to provide scholarship assistance to tens of thousands of students, allowing them to enhance their science education through our unique classroom, outreach or summer camp experiences. That support came from companies, foundations and individuals. We have also received grants for scholarships or certain programs from national and regional institutions.

# DONORS

The Saint Louis Zoo would like to thank the generous donors that help make our education programs possible:

## Program Gifts:

Anonymous  
Edward Chase Garvey Memorial Foundation  
Engelhardt Family Foundation  
Equifax  
Knisely Family Foundation  
Mercy Kids  
Monsanto Company  
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### **Our Mission**

The mission of the Saint Louis Zoo is to conserve animals and their habits through animal management, research, recreation, and educational programs that encourage the support and enrich the experience of the public.

For more information, visit [stlzoo.org/education](http://stlzoo.org/education)

