

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL GROUPS*
SPONSORED BY FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL ZOO (FONZ)

National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution
Washington D.C.

Introduction

The Friends of the National Zoo education program was begun in 1968. At that time an interested group of FONZ members began a guided tour program staffed by volunteers. By 1972 the program had grown substantially and a full time staff person was hired to handle the administrative work, plus begin development of more educational services.

At the present time (1975) the Education Department consists of three paid staff members (two full-time; one part-time) plus forty-four volunteer guides and six volunteer docents.

Guide Program

The guide program has been active since 1968. Participants are volunteers who have been trained to give tours covering a wide variety of subject matter; e.g. mammals, reptiles, birds, adaptations, social behaviour etc.

Guide training programs are offered by FONZ twice a year and run for five weeks (3 hours per day, 3 days per week). Training of new guides is done primarily by more experienced members of the program. Written training materials concentrate on general animal characteristics as well as providing some information on some of the species found in the Park. FONZ maintains a library for the use of the guides and much of their learning takes place without direct guidance and is self-motivated.

All members of the program meet once a month for ongoing training and several times a year members of the curatorial/research staffs give lecture series on areas of special interest.

Docent Program

The docent program, in operation since 1973, is an outgrowth of the guide program. Those volunteers who have cultivated a specific area of interest are invited to become docents in one of the animal houses. Candidates for these positions must have spent at least one year in the guide program. Participants essentially train themselves with the help of curators.

Docents are stationed in the houses for two hours every weekday morning. Their responsibility during this time is to answer questions from the general public and groups taking self-guided tours. From time to time they may take special tours through the building. In addition, curators may request docents to aid in taking animal observations.

Audience

The educational programs are designed almost exclusively for use by elementary school teachers and their classes (school children attending elementary schools are from 5 to 12 years of age). From time to time we provide services for older students. Requests for the latter are relatively few hence they do not comprise a major part of our effort.

Guided Tours: Available for grades 3 and over (Children ages 8 and over)

Guided tours are given Monday - Friday at 10 a.m. and generally last for two hours. Guided tours must be scheduled in advance. Upon arrival at the Zoo, classes are divided into groups of 10, each with an assigned guide.

As described in the "Announcement Brochure", elementary school classes coming for the "World of Mammals", "Vanishing Animals", and "The World of Reptiles and Amphibians" receive pre-tour materials. These materials include a set of slides and a brochure which talks about the animals in the slides. This information is provided free of charge. The slides are loaned and must be returned, however, the printed material is kept by the visiting teacher.

At the present time groups requesting other tours of the Zoo, or groups above the elementary school level, do not get pre-tour materials.

Self-Guided Tours: Primarily for pre-school through
grade 2 (Ages 3 through 7)

We do not provide guided tours for this age group. Teachers who call in advance receive packets similar to those available in the guided tour program, but include maps which are specially marked so that the teacher can follow a route and see the same animals here at the Zoo that the children saw in class.

Self-guided groups are informed of the docents stationed in the houses in case they should require further assistance. (In instances where our guided tour program is unable to accommodate a group which would normally have a guide, self-guided tour materials are offered as an alternative.

* The information above does not include material on educational programs which are offered to the membership, for instance, classes, lectures, films, et al.

SOME-NEWS -FROM-THE-ZOOS

Sao Paulo Zoo, Brazil plans to start building its education centre next year. Then, a lecture theatre is to be built and a programme of zoology courses inaugurated. Meantime, lectures on wildlife conservation are given to members of the Forest Service and special training courses are held for biology and veterinary students.

Zoo Berlin has started on its projected zoo school but completion will obviously take some time.
