

# Barranquilla Zoological and Botanical Foundation

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The Barranquilla Botanical and Zoological Foundation (Fundazoo) is a non-profit organisation that currently administers Barranquilla Zoo, a five-acre urban zoo located in Barranquilla, a city of 1.7 million inhabitants on the north coast of Colombia, South America.

Fundazoo was created in 1993 to lead the process of recovery and reconstruction of Barranquilla Zoo, a 50-year-old institution that had much deteriorated, both physically and financially, under the city's public administration.

Throughout the past nine years, Fundazoo has been able to remodel 85% of the zoo, based on a master plan which focused on developing naturalistic animal exhibits, replicating native habitats and thus providing better living conditions for the captive animal collection.

All of this was possible as a result of an aggressive fund-raising campaign directed at local commercial and industrial companies from the private sector, and also through institutional programmes such as the "Adopt an Animal" scheme, which currently groups more than 50 local and regional entities.

Currently Barranquilla Zoo has an animal collection of over 450 individuals of 160 species, 85% native to Colombia and 15% exotics from Africa, Asia, Australia and North America.

Visitor numbers have increased by almost 45% over the last nine years, now averaging some 300,000 annually.

Fundazoo has also worked on strengthening the educational potential of the zoo, creating an Education Department in 1996. This has become a focus of activity within the zoo, a centre of development for environmental education strategies such as public awareness campaigns, community outreach programmes and developing educational material for the classroom, designed to support the efforts of local schools to teach about the natural environment.

All of these objectives were proposed and planned in a three-year education master plan, currently in its first year of development.

One of the most successful experiences of Fundazoo has been the development of an educational campaign for the conservation of the Cotton-top tamarin (*Saguinus oedipus*), a small primate endemic to the north coast of Colombia and highly endangered as a result of the illegal pet trade and deforestation.

The objectives of this campaign included increasing the general public's knowledge of the species, especially its endemic condition and endangered status encouraging a positive attitude towards the Cotton-top, strengthening a sense of pride and 'ownership' increasing environmental responsibility among the public, including awareness of the need to conserve wildlife and thus reducing the illegal pet trade in Cotton-top tamarins.

This campaign was developed in two phases: a three-month media awareness scheme and an educational programme currently in operation.

The media awareness effort focused on using local media (radio, TV and newspapers) to communicate the campaign's message, selling promotional material in commercial malls throughout the city and developing educational activities within the zoo, using the recently built Cotton-top tamarin exhibit.

The material developed for the classroom had a wide scope, including not only the tamarins but also drawing attention to the numerous threats faced by wildlife as a whole, to general ecological principles and to the role humans can play in creating, or solving, these problems.

For the development of this campaign, Fundazoo obtained the support of local and international institutions, including Conservation International, Pittsburgh Zoo, Cleveland Zoo, Disney's Animal Kingdom (Proyecto Titi) and Dupont Colombia S.A.. The fund raising collected close to US\$30,000, exceeding all expectations.

Fundazoo is currently planning new, follow-up activities and strategies to be implemented over the coming months. It is committed to its mission and vision, aiming to lead environmental education throughout the Caribbean region of Colombia, one of the seven most biologically diverse countries in the world, but also a nation with one of the highest rates of deforestation and habitat destruction.