

# PLANETKEEPER – Tiger Task Force

## *‘Partners in Conservation’*

*John Gardner, Adelaide Zoo Education Officer*

Zoo education should not only include awareness, knowledge and understanding of social and ecological aspects of conservation and engender positive attitudes, but should also empower people to take ‘positive action’ for conservation. It was this belief that motivated the Adelaide Zoo Education Service to develop and implement ‘Planetkeeper’, a programme for schools with just such an aim.



*As part of the action component of the programme, one teacher included use of Indonesian language in one of the awareness activities*

The Adelaide Zoo Education Service is itself the result of a long-term partnership between Adelaide Zoo, the State Education Department and Catholic Education; this has allowed its formation and enabled it to operate for schools and the public.

The Planetkeeper programme demonstrates how partnerships can, with an added component of ‘action’, assist in the conservation of threatened species. It involves a commitment by school children (Reception – Year 12) to assist in the survival of tigers in a number of ways, and includes both ‘Knowledge’ and ‘Action’ components.

Currently, Planetkeeper concentrates on tigers, but the focus animal could be any species and will change from time to time.

‘Partners in Conservation’ is central to the entire Planetkeeper – Tiger Task Force programme, and without such cooperation it could not be successful. The first of these partnerships was formed well before the programme started, with communication between the Adelaide Zoo Education Service and Bittu Saghal, editor of Sanctuary Magazine in India, and others. These contacts, plus Bittu’s knowledge, experience and value as a source of information and suggestions, were crucial in establishing the foundations of the Planetkeeper scheme. Our thanks go to Bittu, and also to former Education Officer Melissa Wyatt for her role in the development of the programme.

Schools, Adelaide Zoo, its Education Service and tiger keepers form partnerships in the first stage of the Planetkeeper programme.

Classes that commit to the scheme receive a lesson with an Education Officer at the zoo. During the lesson discussions occur about such things as tiger adaptations and their survival value, where and how they live, the Sumatran tiger’s habitat and its role within it. The plight the species is faced with is also considered, along with the contributing social issues.

Depending on the age of the students, these issues could include population growth, poverty, economic crises, culture and consumerism. Other discussions take place about the role funding, or lack of it, can play in endeavours to assist tiger conservation. Children are also given the opportunity to see, touch, handle and learn about tiger artefacts and traditional medicines, as well as to find out what role other children have played and how they too can be effective in working towards tiger sustainability.

During their day at the zoo the students also attend a session with the tiger zookeeper. The keeper talks about feeding, housing, enrichment, general needs and issues specific to the zoo’s animals, as well as answering any questions. This is done where students can view our two Sumatran tigers.

For visiting the zoo and attending both Education Officer and keeper 'Knowledge' sessions, the students receive their first certificate.

To achieve Certificate 2 level, the 'Action' stage of Planetkeeper has the students involved in fund raising – minimum target \$100.00(Aus) - as well as at least one other activity. This may include writing a letter to a Prime Minister or President, or starting a petition, writing an article for a school or community newspaper, sponsoring a tiger or any other activity – writing to a pen pal, for example – that will raise awareness of conservation issues..

When they join teachers receive a Resource Pack to assist them. It contains tiger information, zoo trails, a myriad of ideas for fund raising, contact details for letter writing, petitioning and protesting and ideas encouraging children to act responsibly towards their own local environment.

Upon completion of the fund raising and other 'Action' components of the programme, an application for Certificate 2 is completed. This requires the teacher to report on what the children did to raise money, how much was collected and an account of the other activities they were involved in. A successful application will enable the students to receive their second certificate and become official Planetkeepers.

It is envisaged that a page on the zoo's Education Service web site will keep students up to date on tiger matters, both locally and globally, and also allow them to e-mail us about any other conservation efforts they become involved in.

The next stage sees another partnership, involving the delivery of the funds raised by students to their chosen conservation organisation via the Adelaide Zoo's Education Service. Currently, funds are directed to the ARAZPA Wildlife Fund Tiger Project or Save the Tiger Fund to assist these organisations in their efforts to conserve tigers.

Bodies such as these rely heavily on funding through such things as grants and donations. Although individual amounts raised can be relatively small, many such contributions over time will lead to significant results.

One class from an Adelaide school raised \$600.00(Aus) selling food at a school Sausage Sizzle on Federal Election Day, as well as other activities that included producing posters and writing letters to heads of government, newsletter articles and information leaflets that were distributed throughout the local community. A special needs class with only eight students managed to raise \$500 (Aus) through a variety of activities which included placing 'Tiger Head' money boxes in local businesses. Another class was so inspired by the whole Planetkeeper experience that they raised extra money that they sent to other conservation organisations involved in helping threatened species.

We are hopeful that there is no final stage for the Planetkeeper programme, but that students and teachers will carry with them, for life, the knowledge, skills and motivation to continue to be involved in conservation, inspiring others into action to 'make a difference' by working as Partners in Conservation.



*During the lesson with an Education Officer students have hands-on fun and learning with tiger artefacts*