

Guadalajara Zoo's participation in conservation education programmes – an English synopsis

It is three years since Guadalajara Zoo's Education Department began participating in conservation programmes outside the institution itself. The programmes concerned are organised by Mazatlan Aquarium, in conjunction with the institution "Desarrollo Integral de la Familia" – a government body that supports the development of families and communities – and are directed at rural communities of low economic resources in the south of the state of Sinaloa.

The aquarium's Education Department seeks to support the protection and conservation of nature through an agenda designed for elementary school children and including a programme called "Childhood Encounters for Conservation". These events bring together children from different communities for a week full of meetings, workshops, games, songs and learning opportunities of all sorts. Three camps are held during the year, each with a different theme, such as sea turtle conservation, the conservation of birds and, focussing on a specific habitat, the protection and management of wildlife in the Gulf of California.

The main aim of the encounters is that, through a process of teaching-learning, the children's awareness is raised about issues concerning natural resources. They are thus encouraged to appreciate their true value and importance. They come to realise a balance must be reached between the needs of humans and the continued survival of ecosystems and that they must play a part in the care and protection of their surroundings.

The encounters provide a unique opportunity for the children, helping them to understand and analyse environmental problems.

The participation of Guadalajara Zoo in Childhood Encounters for Conservation has been of great importance, for both the institution and in accomplishing the aims of the programme.

The zoo supports Mazatlan Aquarium by sending one or two instructors to each of the camps. These instructors form part of the group



of advisors responsible for the development of the various activities and workshops and including arts and crafts, didactic games and awareness dynamics.

The results have been very favourable, contributing to the education of children, helping to change perceptions and behaviours and encouraging respect for the environment. Furthermore, the staff of the zoo's Education Department has also felt enriched through the experience of dealing with children from rural communities, exchanging creative ideas with colleagues and learning about the organisation required for such programmes. In view of these satisfactory outcomes, Guadalajara Zoo's future objectives now include developing similar programmes in other parts of the Republic of Mexico.