



Riverbanks Education Department

The Education Department at Riverbanks Zoo & Garden offers a variety of enriching programs that interpret the natural world using plant and animal collections and exhibits.

Programs for preschool through college groups are offered Monday through Friday during the school year. Dozens of single grade-level programs, developed in compliance with state-mandated science curriculum, address topics as varied as adaptation, conservation, ecology, plant anatomy and marine biology, and have been designed to meet the needs of traditional schools as well as multi-grade level home-school groups. In fact, the Zoo offers Home School Mondays from Sept.–May, catering to the increasing home school market. Other programs are tailored to serve groups with mental disabilities. All lessons are student centered with each focusing on a specific critical question. Through simple investigation, learners use their observational skills to create and test hypothesis.

The Education Department also offers a series of Riverbanks Society programs. These programs have been designed for audiences consisting of parents and their infants, children, adults and families. The Adventure Program series includes a Tuesday evening camp, overnight camps for school groups and special badge programs for Brownie, Junior and Cadet Girl Scouts. The Summer Program series, called "Wild Weeks," serves rising kindergarten through ninth-graders. Initiated in 2003, ZOOM! into Spring is a day camp offered during spring break. In 2004, a similar program called Winter Break Camp began during the month of December. All programs focus on animal behavior and adaptations, ecology, endangered species and the expanding role of modern zoos, aquariums and botanical gardens in conservation.

The Education Center opened in 1983 and houses staff offices, a library and two classrooms as well as the department's teaching collections of animals and biofacts. Additional classrooms at Riverbanks Farm and the Aquarium Reptile Complex are used for specific education programs.

The Education Outpost program, initiated in the spring of 1999, posts trained volunteers with artifact-loaded pushcarts around the Zoo to help educate curious visitors as they walk through the park. Combined with the formal education programs, an average of 200,000 children and adults participate in the Zoo's education programs. In addition, the Education Department is responsible for on-site graphic information, which reaches all Riverbanks visitors.

In the summer of 2003, Riverbanks began the Helping Hands—Teens in Action in the Community program aimed at at-risk teens. The teens assist in animal husbandry and summer camp, and also plan and lead several programs for special needs participants at Camp Sunshine. In 2004, The American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) recognized the program with its highest education award.

The Education Department staff includes a director, program coordinators, teachers and a secretary. Additional teachers and staff are hired to assist with Wild Weeks each summer.