

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Lincoln Park Zoo's Young Researchers Collaborative Recognized for Significant Achievement

Silver Spring, Maryland (Sept. 29, 2011) – The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) today announced that Lincoln Park Zoo has been recognized for Significant Achievement in the AZA 2011 Education Award for its Young Researchers Collaborative.

The AZA Education Award recognizes outstanding achievement in educational program design, judging programs on their ability to promote conservation knowledge, attitudes and behavior, show innovation, and measure success.

“The Lincoln Park Zoo is focused and effective at science education,” said AZA President and CEO Jim Maddy. “This award provides well-deserved recognition for the hard-working professional educators at the zoo.”

Zoos play a critical role as informal science learning institutions to support science literacy. Studies show that many K-12 classroom teachers do not fully understand the true nature of the research process. Therefore, Lincoln Park Zoo created Young Researchers Collaborative, a nine-month program focused on supporting educators in making inquiry-based science a key component of the classroom curriculum. The overall goal of the program is to promote science literacy amongst students and teachers.

Lincoln Park Zoo's Education Department collaborated with eight Chicago public schools, focusing on grades 6th-8th. Overall, eight teachers and approximately 800 students participated in Young Researchers Collaborative for the 2010-2011 school year.

The program specifically focused on animal behavior studies, conducted both at the school site and at the zoo in order to teach students research skills advocated by the National Science Education Standards and the newly published Framework for K-12 Science Education. These skills include making observations, collecting and analyzing data, drawing conclusions, and communicating results. A companion website titled EthoSearch (www.ethosearch.org) will serve as a resource for teachers to continue ethogram studies after the completion of the program as well as allow students to conduct individual ethogram projects outside of school hours.

“Science literacy is more than just knowing the facts. Also critical is an understanding of how researchers reach their conclusions and the process of scientific inquiry. Young Researchers Collaborative is focused on helping students and teachers understand the process of research by putting them at the helm of their own investigations,” explained Leah Melber, Ph.D. Lincoln Park Zoo's Director of Student and Teacher Programs. Melber is also the author of the educational resource book *Informal Learning and Field Trips* (2008) and co-author of *Teaching Science to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Elementary Students* (2011).

The Young Researchers Collaborative program comprised of two teacher professional development workshops, several zoo field trips to conduct animal observations, several visits by a zoo educator to the school site to lead explorations of the schoolyard as well as practice data analysis, and the opportunity to attend a conservation research lecture at the zoo. The final culminating event, called Science Celebration, was held at the zoo on April 28, 2011 to showcase the students work over the year, and provide them an opportunity to share their discoveries with the public.

The program not only supports teachers in making quality connections between the classroom curriculum and the work of zoo researchers, but also provides students with first-hand experience as junior researchers, promoting a deeper appreciation for the environment and conservation.

Chicago's Lincoln Park Zoo, a historic landmark founded in 1868, is dedicated to connecting people with nature by providing a free, family-oriented wildlife experience. A leader in conservation science both globally and locally, the zoo exemplifies the highest quality animal care and educational outreach. The not-for-profit zoo, managed by The Lincoln Park Zoological Society, is a member-supported organization and one of the nation's only free, privately managed zoos. For more information, call (312)742-2000 or visit www.lpzoo.org.

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, education, science, and recreation. Look for the AZA logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation, and your link to helping animals in their native habitats. To learn more visit www.aza.org.

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