

Summer Camp Guide

2026



LINCOLN PARK ZOO®

camps

Welcome to Lincoln Park Zoo's Summer Conservation Camp and Summer Zoo Crew. We are excited to see you this summer!

This packet is full of information to help you prepare for your summer camp experience. Please read all materials carefully. If any questions are not answered in these pages, feel free to contact us.

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Camp Mission Statement

We are dedicated to empowering children to become the next generation of environmental stewards through learner-directed, evidence-based nature play experiences in an inclusive and accessible camp community.

Camp Values

Community	Integrity	Respect	Resilience
Leadership	Effort	Creativity	Empathy

Lincoln Park Zoo strives to provide a camp experience that supports the whole child. We offer a safe and engaging environment that challenges and supports each camper as they try new things, make new friends, and navigate new situations.

We encourage campers to build resilience and practice their problem-solving skills. We support them in finding their own solutions to obstacles they face.

We provide opportunities for campers to practice leadership skills and develop empathy for people, animals, and the natural world.

Respect is the cornerstone of camp at Lincoln Park Zoo. Throughout each camp session, staff members emphasize showing respect for property, others, nature, and yourself, and guide campers to demonstrate that respect. We seek to be a place where all campers feel welcomed and included.

Contact Information

Email	camp@lpzoo.org
Phone	312-742-2056
Web	lpzoo.org/camp
Emergency	312-805-3124



Check-in and Checkout

Check in between 8:45–9:15 a.m.

Pedestrians should walk south from Fullerton Parkway on Cannon Drive (zoo parking lot) past the zoo's East Gate to access the outdoor camp check-in area at the camp entrance, which is on the east side of the Judy Keller Education Center (under the Endangered Species Carousel) in the zoo parking lot. If coming from south of the zoo along Stockton Drive, walk across the bridge over South Pond to Cannon Drive, turn northbound, and walk to the camp check-in area. Or, enter zoo grounds from the West Gate on Stockton Avenue, walk across the zoo's Main Mall and exit the East Gate to turn right to go to the camp entrance. Please accompany your camper to the outdoor check-in line; staff will be on hand daily to assist.

If driving, enter the zoo parking lot by turning south off Fullerton Parkway onto Cannon Drive. If you are a Lincoln Park Zoo member with unlimited parking, you may use your member ID to enter. If not, take a ticket for 30 minutes of free parking. Look for signs designating temporary camp parking spaces and park south of the stop sign in front of the camp entrance. Park with hazard lights on and accompany your camper to the outdoor check-in line, where you'll wait your turn to talk with staff at the tables.

Any adult caregiver of your choice may check your camper in. IDs are only required at checkout. Once your camper's check-in is complete, camp staff will escort them into the camp building; only campers and camp staff are allowed enter the building.

Upon arrival on your first day of camp, those driving will receive an orange temporary camp parking placard which allows for parking in the designated camp temporary parking area for check-in/out only. This is necessary whether you hold a zoo membership or not. Once check-in is complete, cars must be moved.

Lincoln Park Zoo camp programs cannot provide free parking vouchers for individuals who stay longer than 30 minutes.

Check out between 3–3:15 p.m.

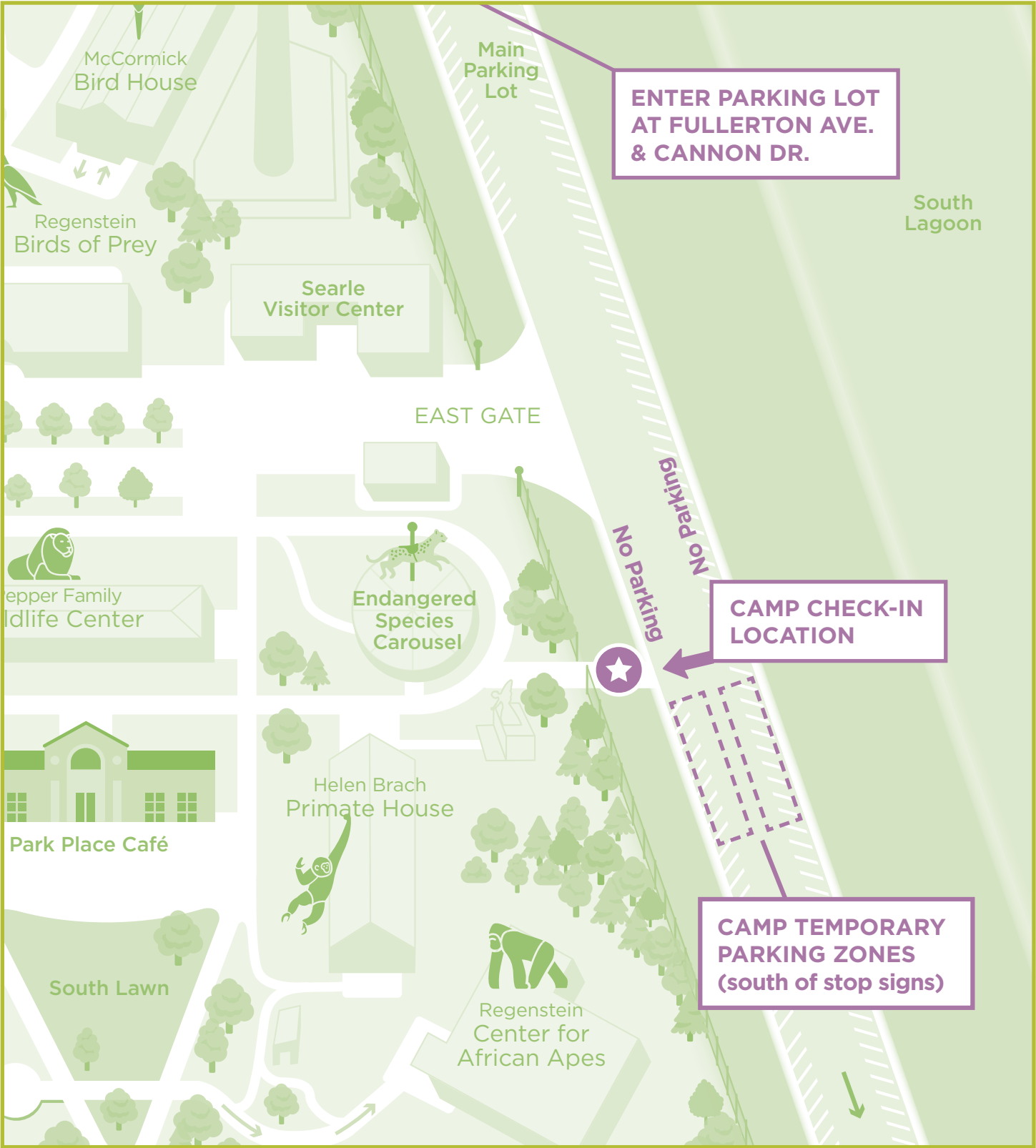
Camper checkout starts at 3 p.m. and ends no later than 3:15 p.m. in the same location and manner as morning check-in described above. If you are driving, have the orange temporary parking placard displayed on your dashboard. If walking, a parking placard is not needed.

Have a valid photo ID ready to present every day at checkout and share your camper's first and last names. All adult caregivers who check out campers must be listed as an authorized pickup person on the camper's registration and show photo identification each day, even if parents or relatives or camp staff are familiar with you. Thank you for your cooperation and understanding.

Self check-in and checkout

Adult caregivers may authorize their Zoo Crew campers to check themselves in and out of camp. Campers must have a permission slip signed by a parent or guardian on file in order to participate in self check-in and checkout. Zoo Crew campers may only check themselves in and out of camp. They may not check out younger siblings.

Camp Parking Map



Aftercare

Aftercare spots will be available for purchase to paid program registrants. If Aftercare is purchased, communications will be forthcoming. Aftercare campers may be checked out any time between 3–5 p.m. Please park in the temporary parking zone described above and call the camp phone number, which can be found on the signage and orange parking placard. Camp staff will escort your camper to meet you at the check-in/out tables. Please allow for a bit of additional time if you pick up before 4:30 p.m., as campers may be out and about on zoo grounds at the time of your arrival.

Aftercare is comprised of campers from all grade groups. During Aftercare, campers typically visit zoo grounds and participate in games and other indoor activities in Judy Keller Education Center. All participating campers receive a daily snack at the start of Aftercare.

Late Arrivals and Early Departures

Please limit or avoid late check-in and early checkout if possible. These disrupt the flow of the camp day, cause staff to be pulled away from programming and other essential duties, and result in missed activities for your camper. Please make every effort to respect the camp schedule. If necessary, please plan to time late arrivals and early departures between 11:45 a.m.–12:30 p.m. when possible. All late arrivals or early departures should be arranged in advance by contacting camp staff at camp@lpzoo.org or mentioning them the day prior at the check-in/out tables.

Absent Campers

If your camper will miss a day of camp due to vacation, illness, unexpected circumstances, etc., please send a message to camp@lpzoo.org or call 312-742-2056 to leave a message sharing the name of your camper and noting they will not be present at camp that day. If your camper does not show up for camp on a given day, we will call guardians to ensure everything is all right.

If a Zoo Crew camper with self check-in and checkout permission is not at camp by 9:15 a.m. and we have not received prior information regarding their absence, a member of the camp team will notify emergency contacts.

Camp Gear Pickup

Camp T-shirts and backpacks will be given to campers on their first day of camp or at gear pickup dates (scheduled prior to first day of the camp season). These dates and times will be communicated with you via email. Due to the high volume of camp families, individual gear pickups outside of these times cannot be accommodated.

Adults Authorized to Pick Up Campers

All adult caregivers who check out campers must be listed as an authorized pickup person on the camper's registration and show photo identification each day, even if they are a parent or relative or if camp staff are familiar with them. Any additions can be emailed to camp@lpzoo.org at least a week before any given camp week or shared with staff at check-in in the mornings.

What to Bring



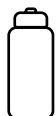
Backpack

A camp backpack is provided to every camper who opted in to receive one. Whether your camper receives a camp backpack or brings their own, please label it with your camper's name.



Camp T-shirt

One camp T-shirt will be provided for every week that you registered to attend. If you purchased additional T-shirts, you will receive them on the first day of your camp week during check-in or during the optional camp gear pick-up days. You will be given the exact T-shirt size ordered in your registration. Camp shirts from last year may be worn.



Refillable water bottle

Please have your camper bring a water bottle filled with ice water and label it with your camper's name prior to the start date for camp.



Sunscreen

Please label with your camper's name prior to the start date for camp. Make sure your camper is wearing sunscreen before your daily arrival at the check-in table.

What Not to Bring



Cellphones and Smartwatches

Lincoln Park Zoo camp is a tech-free zone. Campers should not bring cellphones or smartwatches to camp. Camp staff reserve the right to remove a cellphone from a camper's possession for the duration of the camp day. Phones will be held in a secure location until checkout.



Other

Please leave at home any electronic devices and entertainment items, including video games, all toys, puzzles, books, games, trading cards, plush animals, jewelry, and other valuables.

Lincoln Park Zoo is not responsible for lost, left-behind, broken, or stolen items.

What to Wear

Mandatory camp T-shirt

If you did not pick up your items during one of the gear pickup days, your camper will receive one T-shirt on their first camp day, along with any additional shirts previously purchased in the size indicated.

On Monday, campers wear their own clothing and will either put on the camp T-shirt over their clothing or change into the camp T-shirt. This takes place in an individual stall with a closed door in restrooms under camp staff supervision. On all other days, campers must arrive wearing the camp shirt.

Lincoln Park Zoo camp shirts from last year may be worn. Conservation Camp shirts (rising PreK-Grade 5) are blue in color; Zoo Crew versions (rising Grades 6-8) are green.

Weather-appropriate clothing

Campers should have appropriate clothes for the day's weather, including rainwear, light jackets, hats, and sunscreen. Sunscreen must be applied before campers check in.

Comfortable closed-toe, closed-back shoes

Sneakers are a great option. No sandals are allowed. If wearing Crocs, campers must have the back straps positioned around their heels. Campers who are not in the proper footwear may be asked to sit out from activities, including special ones with keepers, for safety reasons.



Lunch and Snack

Each day, your camper should bring a nut-free lunch and a daily snack* (unless the add-on lunch was purchased). Due to the prevalence of allergies, we ask that you do not send your child with anything containing nuts; this includes peanuts as well as tree nuts such as almonds, cashews, walnuts, pine nuts, etc. This also includes Nutella sandwiches, Nutella-based items, or any type of nut sandwich spread.

Please send a lunch that does not need to be heated or refrigerated—feel free to include an ice pack. Camper lunches are kept inside the temperature-controlled camp building. Campers will place their lunches in their labeled cubby or classroom cabinet to ensure freshness before lunchtime.

An add-on lunch will be available for purchase during registration. If the add-on lunch is purchased, campers will receive a freshly made lunch each day they are present during lunchtime, as well as a daily snack. Gluten-free or vegetarian options will be provided only if noted at time of registration.

**Lincoln Park Zoo camp is nut free and strives to accommodate dietary and allergy needs as best we can. We want our camp families to be aware that, as this is a free and public zoo, campers may potentially come into contact with nuts or other allergens while out on zoo grounds.*

As an added measure of protection for campers with severe nut allergies, our camp counselors do a visual check of campers' lunches during check-in to ensure there are no nut products in our lunch areas.



Medical Information

You provided your camper's medical information during the registration process. Please note, Lincoln Park Zoo does not retain camper medical information from year to year. Be sure to share all relevant health info on your camper's registration, even if you have shared it with zoo staff in the past. If any information has changed since the time of your registration, please email camp@lpzoo.org a week or more before your child's camp week. All information will be kept confidential and will not be shared beyond camp staff who will be working directly with your child. If you specifically requested contact on the registration form, you can expect someone to reach out to you three to five days prior to your camp start date.

Camp staff are unable to dispense or administer medication. The only exception is the use of prescribed epinephrine auto-injectors (like EpiPens). All prescribed medications a camper will bring should have been noted in your registration.

Campers who take medication during the camp day will need to be able to self-administer. Please have your camper bring only the dose they need for that day. The medication must be in its original container with patient and prescription information.

Camp staff can remind campers to take their medication in a discreet way during the day. Please speak with staff members at check-in, who will relay the information to your camper's counselors.

Health and Safety

Caregivers are the zoo's most important partners in keeping our camp community healthy and safe. If your camper feels unwell or shows any signs of infectious illness (sore throat, new cough, difficulty breathing, vomiting, diarrhea, severe headache, or a fever at or above 100.4 degrees Fahrenheit), please do not send them to camp.

If a camper feels unwell during the camp day, caregivers may be called to pick up their camper after a period of rest. Campers who have symptoms of infectious illness should be tested for relevant illnesses. Campers may return to camp after they have been fever-free for 24 hours without the use of medication and symptoms have improved.

It is Lincoln Park Zoo's responsibility to provide a safe space not only for our staff and guests, but the animals in our care. During camp hours there will be a full-time emergency medical technician on grounds in case of emergency. All camp staff are CPR- and first aid-certified. Additionally, several members of the camp team are certified in mental health first aid.

All campers must be able to use restrooms fully independently.

Camp Day Description

No two camp days are the same. Camp counselors do their best to follow camper interests while selecting each day's activities from our camp curricula; there is always variety. However, there are some things campers can count on:

- Morning and afternoon free play.
- Chats with zoo experts one or two times per week, during which campers can ask their most pressing animal care questions.
- Outside time, as much as weather permits.
- Activities that help campers build knowledge, empathy, and curiosity about animals. These might be movement-based, art-focused, or imaginative.
- Visits to zoo animals; however, animal care is left to our professional zookeepers.
- Special themed activities, which take place every Friday.

Interacting With Campers About Their Day

Consider asking your camper these questions daily:

- What did you choose to do during free play?
- What animals did you see? What were the animals doing?
- Did you play any games? What was the goal of the game?
- What is your camp group's animal name? Does the group have a cheer or a song?
- Did any of the other campers do something silly that made you laugh?
- What did you do to be helpful today?

Outside of the check-in/out area, you'll find the "What Is Happening at Camp Today" sign. On this sign caregivers and campers can find the snack and lunch menu for add-on lunches, the Zoo Expert Chat schedule for the week, and a "Start the Conversation" question for each grade group, which is specific to the camp theme for the day.



Camp Code of Conduct: PONY

Lincoln Park Zoo is committed to creating a safe, engaging, and memorable experience for all of our campers. Our behavior policy is based on teamwork and personal growth, with the core values of PONY guiding every activity and interaction. “PONY” stands for respecting **P**roperty, **O**thers, **N**ature, and **Y**ourself.

Campers will be introduced to the PONY principles in depth each Monday of camp and participate in a daily review. We believe that following these expectations will help everyone make the most of their zoo camp experience:

Property: Respect all camp and zoo materials, exhibits, and spaces. Leave no trace—what you bring in, you bring out!

Others: Treat peers, counselors, zookeepers, and zoo visitors with kindness, patience, and cooperation. Each camper is part of a team where we work together to learn and have fun.

Nature: Show respect for all animals (including zoo residents and wildlife) and their habitats. Observe from a safe distance, follow camp counselor and zookeeper instructions, and remember we are guests in the animals’ home.

Yourself: Care for your body, mind, and emotions. Practice self-control, make safe choices, and ask for help when you need it.

Focusing on Teamwork and Growth

Zoo camp is about “growing the whole child” by nurturing skills beyond their passion for animals. Campers will experience teamwork, problem-solving, and empathy-building activities. Each camper is part of a team, and our counselors are dedicated to supporting every member of the group.

Behavior as a Choice With Consequences

At zoo camp, we recognize that behavior is a choice, and with some choices come consequences. When a camper struggles to meet our expectations, we take steps to guide them back on track with developmentally appropriate consequences. Potential consequences include but are not limited to:

- A supervised “cooldown” period away from their group
- Sitting out from a special activity, such as a keeper chat or a behind-the-scenes tour
- Speaking with a member of the camp leadership team to reflect on behavior and find solutions
- A phone call home to discuss behavior with caregivers
- A behavior contract if ongoing support is needed
- Suspension or expulsion from camp, if necessary

Our goal is always to address behavior with patience and understanding. However, our counselors cannot devote excessive time to one camper at the expense of the whole group. Every camper deserves a supportive and balanced experience, and we appreciate camp families for reinforcing our expectations. In the rare event of suspension or expulsion, we cannot offer prorated registration fees or refunds.

Thank you for your collaboration and support in making Lincoln Park Zoo camp a place where all campers thrive!

Weather

Zoo camp is held rain or shine. Feel free to have rain gear packed for inclement weather. Review the headings “What to Bring” and “What to Wear” for further details.

Every day camp counselors ensure campers are drinking plenty of water, especially on days where heat and humidity are a concern. Staff may include water activities in the schedule to keep things cool.

In the event of extreme weather, campers will be recalled into either the zoo’s education center or the nearest zoo building, in accordance with the zoo’s emergency response plan. During such events, camp and zoo leadership collaborate to ensure the safety of every camper. Should extreme weather significantly impact the camp day (loss of electrical power, damage to zoo grounds, etc.), parents may be contacted to pick up their campers early.

In addition to severe weather, Lincoln Park Zoo monitors air quality to ensure that outdoor play is safe and enjoyable for all campers. On days with poor air quality, camp activities may be modified and outdoor exposure may be limited.

Lost and Left Items

Lost and left items will be held until the end of August, at which time items will be discarded. Lincoln Park Zoo camp programs will practice due diligence to locate lost items. However, if an item cannot be located, Lincoln Park Zoo and program staff are not responsible for lost, left-behind, broken, or stolen property.

Zoo Crew Notes

Zoo Crew campers participate in a field trip to an offsite location each week of their program. Campers travel via school bus and are accompanied by adult camp counselors. Field trip waivers will be provided on the first day of your camper’s camp experience.

On the second Wednesday of their program, Zoo Crew campers are invited to participate in a Late Stay. Campers remain on grounds after the zoo is closed to the public and participate in special activities. Dinner is provided. All campers must be picked up by an authorized adult by 8 p.m. More information about the Late Stay will be given on your camper’s first day of camp.

Inclusion

At Lincoln Park Zoo, we value the inclusion of campers of all abilities. To achieve this, we have an Inclusion Specialist at summer camp who can communicate with families and camp staff to develop accommodations for campers with diverse needs.

The Inclusion Specialist is not a 1:1 aide; we do not provide 1:1 aides. Campers for whom our inclusion model works well are able to participate in structured activities in a group of 14–16 campers with two college-age or older counselors—**without** the Inclusion Specialist for **most** of the day.

The camp environment can be overstimulating for some campers, and this may result in new or unexpected behaviors. In addition to activities in individual camp groups, there are two opportunities for free play during the camp day that take place on zoo and park district grounds with all camp groups present. In cases of overstimulation, the Inclusion Specialist may provide a brief sensory break for campers. However, to ensure safe and successful participation in the program, campers must be able to stay with the group most of the day, with only occasional support from the Inclusion Specialist.

Additionally, all campers must adhere to camp rules and agreements whether or not they have accommodations. This includes, but is not limited to, remaining with the group while not engaging in aggressive or self-injurious behaviors. If your child cannot safely and successfully participate in the program, even with accommodations in place, they may not be ready for camp at the zoo.

For more information, please visit the following pages and scroll down to the section entitled Frequently Asked Questions for [Conservation Camp](#) or [Zoo Crew](#).