

Our plan for
VOLUNTEERING
at **CHESTER ZOO**

Our plan for volunteering at Chester Zoo

Chester Zoo is the most visited zoo in the UK and a global conservation charity. Our mission is preventing extinction and our volunteers play a crucial role in helping achieve this. In particular volunteers are involved in working towards one of the key targets of our Conservation Masterplan, which aims to empower 10 million people to live more sustainably before our 100th birthday in 2031.

OUR ORGANISATIONAL VALUES



MISSION
MOTIVATED



WORKING
TOGETHER



PASSIONATE
PEOPLE



TO BE
THE BEST

PREVENTING EXTINCTION IN A CHANGING WORLD USING OUR INTEGRATED APPROACH TO CONSERVATION, BY 2030 WE WILL HAVE:

PRESERVED options for future conservation for an additional

150

species through conservation breeding and propagation

REVERSED

declines of

200

threatened populations of species in the wild

EMPOWERED

10million

people to live more sustainably

TRAINED

5000

conservationists

IMPROVED

landscapes for wildlife totalling

250,000 ha

INFLUENCED

5

major policy areas for wildlife

In line with our values, we are committed to providing an outstanding volunteer experience. Our volunteering plan guides our work to do this and ensures our volunteer programme activities help us achieve our mission and charitable objectives.

As well as being guided by our own values and strategies, our approach to volunteering is guided by best practice across the volunteering sector. In 2021, we achieved the Investing in Volunteers award, the UK quality standard for volunteer management. And, we regularly network and share practice with colleagues from the Volunteer Managers Working Group for the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Cheshire West Voluntary Action and the National Council Voluntary Organisations amongst others.

Our volunteering priorities have been produced collaboratively with staff, volunteers and a broad range of stakeholders, and are based on primary research we conducted into the impact of volunteering in UK zoos and on regular surveys and reviews with our volunteers.



Volunteering at Chester Zoo

Volunteering has a long history at Chester Zoo dating back to the 1980s, but significant expansion and formalisation of the programme came in 2015, when volunteers were recruited into visitor engagement roles to support the opening of *Islands*. The zoo now engages over 250 volunteers annually in various ongoing and seasonal roles. A dedicated volunteer management team, who sit within the Conservation Education and Engagement department, supports volunteers.

Chester Zoo Volunteers are passionate people who advocate for wildlife and conservation through volunteering. They provide thousands of volunteering hours every year and a wealth of experience and knowledge. Volunteers connect people with nature and Chester Zoo, empowering them to make a positive difference to wildlife through living more sustainably or creating habitats for native wildlife. The majority of volunteers are in visitor engagement and education roles, but there is an increasing number of more specialist roles available, which appeal to different volunteers and support the zoo's educational, scientific and conservation mission. We engage with people of various ages, cultural and educational backgrounds, including young people through youth volunteering and people with disabilities through our supported volunteering scheme.

We recognise volunteering to be a mutually beneficial experience; volunteers can meet new people, feel part of a community, enhance their well-being and gain experience for potential employment and self-development.



"I've been made to feel special during the years I have been a volunteer, my confidence has grown enormously, and I feel far more positive. From experience, you will never meet more happy, caring, thoughtful and committed people than at Chester zoo. It has certainly made a difference to me. One very happy volunteer!"

-Volunteer Margaret

Our vision is to create a *thriving* and **inclusive** volunteer community that contributes to our mission of **Preventing Extinction**.

Our priorities to 2024:

- 1 Enhance and broaden the volunteering opportunities we have available
- 2 Increase the ability of volunteers to empower people to live more sustainably and increase visitor satisfaction
- 3 Attract and engage potential volunteers that represent the diversity of our community
- 4 Foster an ethos of collaborative development for volunteering at Chester Zoo
- 5 Establish a reputation for excellence in volunteering by providing an outstanding experience and sharing good practice
- 6 Empower volunteers to become powerful advocates for conservation by living more sustainably and using their voice to amplify conservation campaigns

① Enhance and broaden the volunteering opportunities we have available

We will achieve this by:

- Adapting our recruitment and training schedule to support volunteering opportunities at different times of the year.
- Increasing the range of volunteer opportunities available, including community, zoo-based and micro-volunteering.
- Developing our reward and recognition system so that it responds to the recognition needs of different volunteers.
- Establishing a volunteer social committee to enable volunteers to connect socially with other volunteers.
- Providing training and mentoring support to enable volunteers to increase their digital skills and reduce digital exclusion.
- Creating opportunities for volunteers to participate in careers development activities.

② Increase the ability of volunteers to empower people to live more sustainably and increase visitor satisfaction

We will achieve this by:

- Creating learning and training opportunities with specialist zoo staff to enable volunteers to build their knowledge of zoo species and conservation campaigns, including refresher training for our key conservation campaigns.
- Working with zoo teams to keep volunteers up to date with news and developments in the zoo.
- Providing volunteers with the opportunity to progress their customer service skills through enhanced training and opportunities to shadow experienced staff or volunteers.
- Growing our digital resource library to support volunteers to access training, learn from home and manage their own learning.
- Providing volunteers with opportunities to share their skills, knowledge and experience with each other, through creating and sharing resources.



3 Attract and engage potential volunteers that represent the diversity of our community

We will achieve this by:

- Expanding our Youth Champions scheme to train more volunteers to support younger people to volunteer, particularly encouraging 18-25 year olds to participate as peer mentors.
- Providing pathways for young volunteers to volunteer following participation in youth education activities, outreach programmes or Duke of Edinburgh schemes.
- Engaging with local youth groups and education settings to raise the profile of volunteering at Chester Zoo and encourage young people to participate.
- Developing community-volunteering opportunities to engage with people from various backgrounds and empower them to take action for wildlife in their local areas.
- Recruiting and training more Support Volunteers to enable adults with disabilities, learning, or health needs to volunteer.
- Adapting volunteer roles to support individuals' needs, motivations, and skills.
- Designing training inclusively to respond to volunteers' different learning needs and using experienced volunteers to support learners.
- Consulting with underrepresented groups to identify barriers to participation and actively develop approaches to reduce those barriers.
- Identifying underrepresented groups in the volunteer cohort and advertising roles in various ways and through channels that enable us to reach a more diverse pool of potential volunteers.
- Using a range of inclusive recruitment processes to reduce participation barriers, such as video role descriptions and volunteer-led open days.



4 Foster an ethos of collaborative development for volunteering at Chester Zoo

We will achieve this by:

- Developing new ways for the Chester Zoo Youth Board to engage with volunteers, creating pathways for young volunteers to join the Youth Board or support their aims.
- Training staff working closely with volunteers to understand how to support volunteers and effectively involve them in developing and delivering programmes. Supporting new staff to understand the roles and responsibilities of volunteers and the ways volunteers contribute to our mission.
- Developing links with the wider voluntary sector or youth organisations to provide growth opportunities for volunteers.
- Working with young volunteers to create youth-friendly volunteering spaces and experiences.
- Co-producing a volunteer journey with volunteers to design an experience that meets a wide range of volunteers' motivations and skills. Focusing on all of the development pathways from recruitment to exit.
- Involving volunteers with the design and delivery of volunteer roles, training and evaluation.
- Introducing best practice guidance for staff to support them when developing roles for volunteers. Providing training and support to enable them to provide a high-quality volunteering experience.
- Hosting joint staff and volunteer events to foster positive relationships with Chester Zoo staff and amplify volunteers' voice.
- Providing more opportunities for the Youth Board and Trustees to connect with volunteers on a formal and informal basis.
- Working with the Trustees and Youth Board to create esteemed rewards and recognition for volunteers.

"Highly recommend becoming a volunteer as I have received support through the buddy scheme and made to feel a part of the Chester zoo team. I have learnt about conservation, my love of animals has grown more and more. I have formed many friendships with the volunteers that I have worked with very supportive I am very lucky to volunteer at the zoo." - Volunteer Jess



5 Establish a reputation for excellence in volunteering by providing an outstanding experience and sharing good practice

We will achieve this by:

- Conducting and publishing research to highlight the impact of volunteers.
- Introducing opportunities for volunteers to share skills and meet with volunteers from other relevant organisations.
- Championing the volunteers' successes and activities through a broad range of communications channels.
- Networking with volunteer management professionals in the voluntary, zoo and related sectors, to learn from peers and share best practice, engaging with conferences, volunteer management platforms, networks and events.

6 Empower volunteers to become powerful advocates for conservation by living more sustainably and using their voice to amplify conservation campaigns

We will achieve this by:

- Training volunteers to increase their awareness of wildlife and conservation issues, pro-conservation campaigns and the ways they can make a personal difference.
- Supporting volunteers to lead peer-learning opportunities within their networks. Providing them with relevant literature or resources to empower their friends and family to act for wildlife
- Working with volunteers to develop new and exciting ways of communicating conservation stories and species information to visitors.
- Enabling volunteers to record pro-conservation activities using the community pages of the Chester Zoo website. Inspiring others to participate and share their own conservation stories.



- Encouraging volunteers to adopt sustainable volunteering methods such as micro-volunteering or volunteering in their local communities. Creating a call to action focusing on sustainable living choices or conservation actions for volunteers during every training session.
- Working with volunteers to create mini-campaigns or events with their communities, such as sustainable gift-giving ideas, recycled fashion shows or community litter picking. Create opportunities for volunteers to connect with other conservation organisations or participate in outreach events such as beach cleans.

Our plan for volunteering accompanies a living framework of activities and impact assessment methods, enabling us to make amendments and improvements as we work through our activities over the next three years. We are realistic about the challenges we face during the pandemic and economic recovery, recognising the need for flexibility with the timeframe for delivery or the activities we prioritise.

We will measure the success and our activities through regular research and monitoring. The volunteer management team will work closely with volunteers and key staff to review the plan's progress.

We want to thank all of our Chester Zoo volunteers and staff for their support in developing our vision to create 'A thriving and inclusive volunteer community that contributes to the mission of preventing extinction'.



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