

# UTICA ZOO VOLUNTEER MANUAL



**Revised: March 2021**  
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# Volunteer Policy and Guidelines

The unselfish act of sharing one's time, talents and energy with another individual or organization is one of a county's most precious natural resources. Americans are currently doing it in record numbers! In 2017, over 77 million people volunteered their time. Together they donated 6.9 billion hours to help out their local communities. Utica Zoo volunteers are vitally important to our success. In today's world of busy lives, we *deeply appreciate* the donation of your time and talents to help us achieve our mission.

Thank you for choosing to volunteer at the Utica Zoo. Included is a list of our expectations and guidelines. **You are responsible for reading and understanding all zoo guidelines, policies and protocols.**



Volunteers may require orientation or training for their desired level of volunteering. Any persons wishing to volunteer with animals must have proof of a current Mantoux test.

Access to the Utica Zoo's inner activities is a privilege; and the lack of material compensation for effort expended on behalf of the zoo in no way frees the volunteer from adherence to the standards that apply to paid staff.

Although the zoo may accord special privileges, volunteers should not accept gifts, favors, discounts, loans, other dispensations, or things of value that accrue to them in connection with carrying out duties for the institution.

Volunteers must hold confidential all matters of program function and administration.

Volunteers are expected to stay current on all program policies, protocols and procedures adopted by the Utica Zoo's administration and Board of Directors and not interfere with the administrative application of these policies and programs.

## **Mission Statement**

The Utica Zoo is dedicated to creating unique experience and promoting appreciation of wildlife through education, conservation and recreation.

**Vision Statement:** The Utica Zoo will be a premier destination for visitor experience while providing excellence in animal care.

### **Goals**

To provide and interpret a high quality, taxonomically diverse and representative collection of animals.

To provide zoological and conservation education, reaching all age groups, while intensively targeting the elementary grades in order to have the most significant impact upon increasing knowledge of, and influencing attitudes toward, wildlife and the environment.

To provide a zoo experience which will stimulate in visitors a desire to learn more about nature and will create an awareness of the need for wildlife conservation. This imparted knowledge and interest will serve as a basis for sound judgment concerning the many complex environmental decisions faced in the community, state and nation.

To provide enjoyable surroundings and recreational opportunities for the community through creative and high quality special events, programs, exhibits and visitor services.

To demonstrate the importance of conservation through involvement in cooperative breeding programs, such as the AZA's Species Survival Plan (SSP), aimed at the conservation of rare and endangered species.

To keep animal care current by the introduction of technological and scientific advances, consistent with the role and resources of a community zoo.

To recruit and retain talented and productive employees.

## **History of the Utica Zoo and the Utica Zoological Society**

The Utica Zoo has served the region for over 100 years. Located in Roscoe-Conkling Park, the zoo is part of a recreational complex made possible by the donation of land from Thomas R. Proctor in 1909. He had a dream that a park could do as much for South Utica as Central Park was doing for New York City. He hired a famous landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmstead Jr., whose father had designed Central Park, to plan the roads and scenic walkways in Roscoe Conkling Park. The Zoo has grown from its small beginnings with three fallow deer in 1914, to its present collection of 99 species of animals. Of the 80 acres of land set aside for the zoo's use, 40 are presently developed.

The Zoo property is owned by the City of Utica, and until 1964, was operated by the Parks Department. In order to ensure the Utica Zoo's continued existence, the Utica Zoological Society assumed full management of the zoo in 1964. At that time, the zoo became a member of the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums. The Utica Zoo is currently fully accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Accreditation was first granted in March 1988 and again in September of 2018. The first professional zoo director was hired in 1966. One year later, Marlin Perkins officiated at the opening of the Children's Zoo. The society was chartered as an educational institution by the New York State Educational Department in 1968. In 1973, the education department was established with the appointment of a curator to carry out its programs. By 1980, it had expanded to encompass Zoo Camps, Zoomobiles and an educational partnership with the Utica City School District. The late 1980's also saw the first formal training for docents (volunteers), and the program is still going strong today.

The first building, completed in 1920, is currently named the Wildlife Building and houses the administrative offices, auditorium, reptile exhibits, and the zoo's kitchen. In 1981, the Animal Care Center was added to the Wildlife Building for the quarantine and veterinary facilities. The first building made exclusively for animal use was completed in 1927 and still houses the primate collection. In the late 1970's, the Utica Zoo began replacing more common species with endangered species such as the red-ruffed lemur, snow leopard, and green tree python. The zoo acquired several Species Survival Plan (SSP) species including the above as well as red panda, golden lion tamarin, and white-handed gibbon. Other major exhibits include the Lion exhibit, California sea lion exhibit (finished in 1986), and the Outdoor White-Handed Gibbon Living Rainforest exhibit, opened in 2018.

Utica Zoo is a regional facility and a sparkling gem for the Mohawk Valley. The zoo receives annual support from Oneida County, an unrestricted grant from the Sinnott Family Fund at Fidelity Charitable, and an annual operating grant from the Natural Heritage Trust (a state agency). The remainder of the budget is raised by the Society. Admissions fees, society membership, special events such as Wine in the Wilderness, Brewfest & Spooktacular, the gift shop, the Animal Adoption program, animal encounters, animal feed sales, stroller rentals, pavilion rentals and donations complete the operating budget income. Major capital improvements are funded through specific fund drives, major grants, and other contributions and sponsorships.

## **Rules of Conduct**

The following rules have been developed as guidelines for volunteer and docent conduct. Because of the importance of our mission, it is necessary to follow these rules so that we can maximize our effectiveness and better bring the message of wildlife conservation to our visitors. Any deviation from these rules may be cause for disciplinary action or suspension from volunteering duties.

- Volunteers should always make themselves easily accessible to zoo visitors and treat them with the utmost courtesy and respect.
- Please keep your work area and zoo property neat. Tools that are used are to be respected and replaced in their proper place after use. If something gets broken during the course of your duty, please notify the volunteer coordinator immediately.
- Profanity, shouting, alcoholic beverages, and general “rough-housing” will not be tolerated.
- No smoking is allowed while on duty.
- It is essential that staff and volunteers work together for the best interest of the zoo. Both staff and volunteers should treat each other with courtesy and cooperation.
- Do not open desk drawers, file cabinets, supply cabinets, etc., without the approval of the staff person in charge of that particular area.
- Do not loiter in the zoo office or with fellow staff.
- Volunteers are not allowed to stay on zoo grounds after the zoo office is closed without the approval of the curators or the director.

## **Appearance**

Remember, while you are here, you represent the zoo and each employee working here. A smile should be part of your uniform!

- It is your responsibility to be neat and clean.
- No open toe shoes are allowed. Sneakers are acceptable; however, leather boots are recommended and may be required for some jobs.
- Clothing should be appropriate for the weather. No short shorts or questionable slogans.
- No cologne or perfume should be worn.

## **Interactions with Visitors**

Our visitors are very important! We think of them as guests and extend the same hospitality as a host or hostess. As a zoo volunteer, you will extend friendly, helpful service whenever possible. Volunteers should be familiar with the various programs and services the zoo provides. If our visitors have questions about our programs and services that you cannot answer, refer them to the Main Office.

Remember, everyone is different. Accept people as they are. Our visitors come from many states and foreign countries. They represent every race, creed and culture. They are rich, poor, refined and unrefined. Some are having a wonderful visit and others may be tired after dealing with a cranky child. Remember to put yourself in their shoes and treat them as you would like to be treated. Many of our visitors are disabled. In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Utica Zoo is committed to make our institution as accessible as possible to those who are physically challenged. We also have many mentally challenged visitors and we wish to make them welcome. A smile or an offer of assistance from you could make a big difference in their day.

## **Public Relations**

Your attitude plays an important role in how the Utica Zoo is viewed by the public and our peers. Polite language and good manners are the rule while you are on duty or on break in a public area. Do not discuss any confidential information such as:

- data regarding operational costs or finances
- personal information about employees, guests, volunteers or donors

- unpublished information about zoo animals animal such as births, deaths, husbandry, behaviors, complications and veterinary practices/procedures
- work related details outside your assigned position and responsibilities
- private information regarding operations that is not available to the general public and “behind the scenes” details such as construction projects or new additions

This policy includes discussing these items with, but not limited to, media outlets, visitors, family or friends without prior consent from staff and includes information passed over social media and private sources such as email, letter or phone communications. Any breach of this confidentiality can result in the termination of your volunteerism. This policy extends beyond your volunteer terms if you end your tenure at the zoo or if you are terminated from volunteering. Refer all questions to the PR department or your immediate supervisor.

### **Causes for Disciplinary Action**

The Utica Zoo prefers to rely on the good judgment of its volunteers rather than impose a long list of rigid rules. Listed below, however, are examples of offenses that can result in disciplinary action or dismissal from the docent or volunteer program:

- theft of, or intentional damage to zoo or employee property
- mistreatment of animals
- insubordination
- possession of intoxicants, narcotics, or firearms
- disregard of safety or instruction, unauthorized use or careless operation of equipment, unauthorized contact with animals or entering an animal enclosure without prior approval
- reporting to work under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- refusal to wear required safety equipment
- fighting or inciting a fight

*Please note that these are only examples and not a complete list. Any conduct that falls below the standards for zoo employees will be just cause for disciplinary action.*

### **Rules of the Zoo**

The following rules are made to protect both the public and the animals. Make sure you remind people of this when you are giving a presentation or tour. Anyone not following the rules will be asked to leave the zoo.

- Groups of children or students must be accompanied by an adult at all times. The adults are expected to keep the group together and under control at all times.
- Pets are not allowed at the zoo. A little bark from a small dog on a leash can excite an animal, causing it to injure or accidentally kill itself. Pets can also bring in diseases which can harm zoo animals that are not resistant.
- Toys, such as balls, water guns, skateboards, cap guns, and other noise makers must stay in the car or bus. Balloons and straws are not allowed on zoo grounds because if swallowed, they can be a health hazard for the animals.
- Guard rails and fences are there for a reason: to protect the people from the animals and to protect the animals from the people. If you see anyone climbing the rails, or on the wrong side of the rails, ask them to come back. If the visitor does not listen, or if you are not comfortable asking, find a zoo staff person and report the incident immediately
- Don't feed the animals! This is very important and for good reason. The animals' diets are specially prepared to meet specific nutritional needs. Food brought in by visitors can cause a variety of problems, ranging from “spoiling the animal's appetite,” to killing the animal. If you see someone feeding an animal (unless it is the feed from the coin-operated feeders in the Children's Zoo) report it to a zoo staff person immediately.
- Do not tease, harass, chase, yell at or otherwise bother the animals, for obvious reasons. If you see anyone harassing an animal at any time please speak up.
- Lost Items are to be turned into the gift shop or main office.

## Who's Who at the Utica Zoo

### Executive Director

Director of Administrative Operations  
Administrative and Gift Shop Manager  
Book Keeper  
Director of Animal Care, Education & Conservation

Andria DeLisle Heath  
Nikki Sheehan  
Kyla Jacobs  
Carol Heburn  
Lisa Thompson

### Animal Care Department

Veterinarian  
Veterinary Technician  
Animal Manager  
Keepers

Dr. Ellen Hilton  
Jackie Gregory  
Michael Bates  
Elizabeth Slabaugh  
Jessica Lindsay  
Krystin DeBan  
Leanne Higby  
Marley Ueland  
Melanie Entelisano  
Caleb LaRocca  
Grace Gustke  
Erin Perotta

### Education Department

Education Program Coordinator  
Seasonal Educator  
Beaversprite Director

Kathleen McGill  
Justin Horender  
Mary Hall

### Gift Shop Attendants

Theresa Weir  
Christopher Jakubowski  
Lucy Fuentes  
Meaghen Gape

### Supervisor of Buildings & Grounds

Building & Grounds Maintenance Staff

Gary Mundschenk  
Chris Donohue  
Mikhail Naryvonchyk  
Durahin Yasin

# General Emergency Policies

Every effort is made to safeguard our visitors, volunteers, and employees. If you witness or discover any accident to a visitor, docent or employee, report it immediately to a senior staff member. Report all accidents or injuries, no matter how slight. Senior staff will make arrangements, if necessary, for proper treatment. You will be required to make a report in writing unless staff advises you otherwise.

## Police

Utica police have jurisdiction during any animal escape on or off grounds. Every attempt will be made to allow zoo staff to recapture escaped animals without using firearms; however, human safety must always take precedence. The police stand ready to assist and when necessary, to use firearms. To avoid confusion, it is important that the police have just one spokesperson from the zoo to deal with - all zoo staff may have input, but a final decision must come from the senior person in charge (the director or acting director which may be the animal curator or veterinarian). Confusion will only make the situation more dangerous.

## News Media

Animal escapes are not only dangerous; the publicity surrounding them can adversely affect the credibility of the zoo and all the zoo staff. This can hurt us in many ways. Bad publicity can cause reduced attendance, lower employee morale, and difficulty in sustaining our budget and soliciting donations. To avoid misunderstandings and confusion, all news media inquiries concerning animal escapes or incidents must be referred to administration for an official response. If speaking to the media is unavoidable, be positive, factual, and supportive of zoo operations and staff. Avoid volunteering information or opinions.

## In Any Emergency

No heroics! Do not create panic. Your main job as a docent/volunteer is to stay calm and handle the public. Keep all phone lines open. Remember that no set rules will cover all contingencies, therefore discretion is necessary. Remain calm, get the facts, follow procedures and ensure public safety. Follow all instructions from staff and emergency responders.

## Injuries and Accidents

An accident report must be filled out for any accident that required first aid treatment (except bee stings). This provides a written record for the zoo.

## Human Emergencies

### Injuries to Zoo Staff and Volunteers

1. If you or some other zoo person is injured, report it immediately to your supervisor.
2. If the injury is minor, it will be treated with antiseptic soap and bandaging as need requires.
3. If the injury is major, an ambulance will be contacted.

### Injuries to Zoo Visitors

1. If a visitor receives a minor injury, escort him or her to the office or nearest first aid station, and then report the incident to your supervisor.
2. Treatment will be applied by zoo personnel.
3. In the event of a major injury, report it to your supervisor. Give your supervisor your name, the location of the injured person, and the nature of the injury. An ambulance will be contacted if necessary.



Remember, in the event of any type of accident, remain calm and be observant. Injured people respond differently to injuries. Try to be reassuring and keep the victim calm.

Remember that you are not responsible for coordinating assistance. Always contact a senior zoo staff person to handle any kind of emergency.

Accident reports are kept in all first-aid kits or in the main office.

First-aid kits are located in the following areas:

Main Office - Gift Shop - Zoo Kitchen - Most Area Barns

## **Visitor Evacuation**

Visitor evacuations are required only when a danger or potential danger is clearly present. To ensure public and employee safety, the following procedures are to be implemented as needed.

### **Dangerous Animal Escape:**

Staff and docent response are as listed in the animal escape policy. Additionally, if visitors are in a building that contains an escaped dangerous animal, visitors must leave the building as soon as possible. Zoo staff will ensure that only qualified zoo staff is permitted inside. If a lion or camel (or similar fast moving large animal) escapes several steps are taken:

- a loud speaker announcement is made requesting all people on zoo grounds to immediately get inside a building.
- a zoo response team is organized to include tranquilizer equipment and a lethal firearm.
- the Utica City Police Department is requested.

Visitors must stay in a building until an all clear signal is given. The police have jurisdiction and final authority.

### **Fire and/or Explosion**

If fire breaks out in any zoo building, everyone will evacuate as per the posted evacuation plans located near the fire extinguishers near the exits. The Utica Fire Department will be contacted as soon as possible and senior staff will advise the Fire Chief as to any unique hazards (i.e. animals) in the building.

### **Earthquake**

In the unlikely event of an earthquake, all staff and visitors must evacuate all buildings as soon as possible. If exit is blocked, stand in a metal frame doorway or under a large metal desk and wait to be rescued. Buildings and grounds staff will check and shut off gas lines if possible and monitor for leaks. Appropriate civil disaster services will be contacted as needed.

### **High Winds**

Although the zoo is located outside hurricane and tornado prone zones, high winds do occasionally occur that threaten visitors and exhibits through airborne debris, etc. A loudspeaker announcement will be made instructing visitors that the zoo will be closing and to exit through the main gate.

## Volunteer Position Descriptions

**Special Events Volunteers:** Events volunteers are responsible for a variety of tasks and are essential to the success of any Zoo fundraising event. Utica Zoo has 6 major annual fundraising events as well as several other impromptu fundraisers that can take place at any time. Volunteers can be seen in all aspects of an event. Tasks can include but are not limited to: planning, building décor, decorating, picking up donations from community donors, security, parking, food service, and cleanup. Please note that signing up for a specific event does not guarantee that you will be assigned to work that event. Please submit applications at least ONE MONTH prior to the event. Some events require specific volunteer training.

**You must be at least 18 years or older for:** Eggstravaganza, Earth Day, Spooktacular and Holiday Hoot.

**You must be at least 21 years or older for:** Wine in the Wilderness and Brewfest.

**Administrative Volunteers:** From time to time, our office crew has large projects that they require extra hands with. Some of these projects include bulk mailing, rolling change, filing, data entry, and general clerical work. These positions are filled on a per diem basis and submitting an application for these positions does not guarantee placement.

**Animal-Care Volunteers:** If you love working with and learning about different species of animals, this program may be for you. Animal-care volunteers work side by side with our animal care staff to keep our animals and exhibits clean, safe, and healthy. This can be physical work in sometimes harsh conditions, so you will need to be prepared for tough work! Those applying for animal care volunteer positions should note that there is **a time commitment of at least 4 hours per week with a minimum of 6 months**. Also, these positions **are limited and filled on an “as needed” basis**. You must be at least 18 years old to apply for an animal care volunteer position and submit a current Mantoux test.

**Zoo Ambassadors:** This is a relatively new program that is customer service based. Zoo Ambassadors will serve as a host for visitors with questions/comments about the zoo. We are looking for people with excellent people skills. Some of the duties associated with this position include: setting up and manning a membership table during weekends and high traffic days, greeting and directing visitors to exhibits, and assisting gift shop with crowd control. This position requires an extensive knowledge of the zoo.

**Grounds and Maintenance Volunteers:** Utica Zoo has over 30 acres of lawns, gardens, forests, flowerbeds, ponds, and buildings to maintain. Experience in painting, carpentry, or landscaping is encouraged but not required. Maintenance volunteers work directly with our Maintenance and Grounds staff to keep the zoo a beautiful and clean place to visit.

**Docent\*:** A docent is by definition a teacher, or volunteer who educates the public about animals, their environment, and conservation. The Utica Zoo docents work closely with the education department staff, by helping with educational programs (both on-site and at locations away from the zoo), with the care and cleaning of education animals, animal enrichment, and projects. Some job functions include: attending necessary training and certification classes, meeting the minimum time requirement of 40 hours per year, public speaking, the ability to stand outside for 3 hours, and having a positive attitude.

*\*There are required fees for docent orientation classes as well as annual contributions to the docent organization.*