Introduction

Today the term biodiversity has taken great importance in various areas and fields of science as well in political, economic and social fields. Biodiversity or biological diversity is defined as the variety of life that exists on the planet. This concept is sufficiently comprehensive to include all levels of biological organization. The most widespread definition is included in the Convention on Biological Diversity and defines it as “the variability among living organisms from all sources including, among others, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems“ (CBD, 2001-2005).

Glowka et al., (1996) clarifies that it is not simply the sum of all ecosystems, species and genetic material. On the contrary, it represents the variability within and between them. This is why biodiversity is important not only for ecosystems, but for the human being, as it provides us with food, fuel, the regulation of pests and diseases, it processes and assimilates waste, as well as regulates floods and weather, among other things. Unfortunately biodiversity is gradually shrinking at all levels and this threatens our planet and the life that inhabits it. Currently, the main threats that have been identified to biodiversity are: the reduction, deterioration and fragmentation of habitats, excessive use of resources and overexploitation, the introduction of invasive species, the pollution of bodies of water and soil, and climate change. It is for these reasons that the conservation and preservation of biodiversity depends on everyone of us.

The objectives of the Zoological Garden of the City of Buenos Aires includes presenting the different species that live in Argentina and the various environmental problems that threaten wild populations and, in that way, being able to promote the search for practical solutions to help mitigate or reduce the threats that affect these species directly or indirectly. At the same time, working together with other institutions at either national and/or international levels is proposed, after joining efforts in the diffusion of those environmental problems that affect biodiversity (including species and ecosystems). That is why the Zoo joined the ‘Biodiversity Is Us’ WAZA campaign run in partnership with the International Zoos Educators Association (IZE).

According to WAZA (2015):

Through the discovery of fascinating species data and the interest of visitors, who will join actively in a community willing to make a number of positive changes in the environment will wake up. By performing each and every one of these simple daily activities, we can make a major contribution. “Biodiversity is declining rapidly, but the situation could completely change with the participation of all.”

Our target with Biodiversity is Us is to show people the urgent need for action and ways to do so. Besides being fun and rewarding, many of the actions we are proposing will help us lead a healthier life.

Abstract

During 2015, the Zoological Garden of the City of Buenos Aires held the International Education Campaign “Biodiversity Is Us”, created by the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums (WAZA), and aligned with the objectives of the International Zoo Educators Association (IZE).

The activities were mainly aimed at visitors (children, young people and adults) and the children participants of the non formal education program of the Zoo.

Biodiversity Is Us: International Education Campaign At The Buenos Aires Zoo

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Content

From the material produced by WAZA for its campaign, the Department of Environmental Education developed another specific and material was designed for activities and events in relation with this theme. This material used to promotion, education and recreation, contains information about the campaign and points to work in every event. In addition, several other actions were included where some people could discover how they can contribute to the care of environment and the local and world biodiversity.

To achieve our commitment to the campaign, a series of actions were undertaken in the various educational proposals of the Institutional Educational Project of the Zoological Garden of the City of Buenos Aires that took place during 2015.

In each activity participants who agreed to take part in were evaluated. In some cases evaluations were
developed before the activity to understand the prior knowledge of the participants about the proposed framework and in other cases they were performed before and after the activity. The analysis of all the data collected is under process.

The development of activities in picture

1. Little Nature Keepers
   Educational proposal of annual duration aimed to children with ages between 6 to 12 years old, presented at monthly modules.

2. Commemorative Dates: World Environment Day (WED)
   Educational daylong public event aimed at children aged between 2 and 15 years old.

3. National Children’s Art Competition
   Promotes free drawing to children between 3 and 13 years old. The paintings were received between March and October. The topic for the year 2015 coincided with the campaign “Yungas: Jungles of the Mountain. Among Everyone we Protect their species”.

4. Graphic and sculptural sketches’s contest
   It promotes the elaboration of graphic and sculptural sketches to children (over 8 years old), teens and adults. The theme for the year 2015 in line with the campaign was “BIOdiversity in art”. The Sculpture Museum Luis Perlotti participated in the performance of this contest (http://www.buenosaires.gob.ar/museoluisperlotti).

5. Environmental Education Zoo Course
   Two class topics were chosen from the course “Biomes of the World and Eco-Regions of Argentina” and “Ecology and Conservation of the Biodiversity” which had a direct relationship with the theme of the campaign to complete a training method that differs from the one being done each year.

Total Number of Participants: 943. (children and adults)
Conclusion

The material provided by WAZA led the approach to a basic idea on which the material generated by the Environmental Education Department was adjusted. It was not possible to apply the audiovisual material to the local context. As a result, printed material with educational texts were utilized.

This was the first year in which the use of evaluations to participants was implemented, to both children and adults. In addition to obtaining valuable quantitative research information, an exhaustive investigation was made about the prior knowledge of the public visiting the Zoo of Buenos Aires on the topics being addressed. In Little Nature Keepers pre and post assessments were performed hoping to clarify whether or not there were “immediate” conceptual changes in the children after participating in the activities.

The implementation of this campaign has allowed us to strengthen each of the activities that are performed every year in the Zoo in terms of theoretical content, development of educational materials and logistics of each activity, in which staff from other areas of the park are actively involved in. Detailed records of the number of participants, by activity and age ranges were gathered. This is essential data to share and compare experiences at the both the local and international level.

Such initiatives promote the implementation of similar ideas in different parts of the world, adapting them to the context and characteristics of their communities. The evaluations, criteria, strengths and weaknesses will also differ by region. So will the impact of these actions, and the intensity they may have. On the other hand, the exchange of this information may enable the development of new and revolutionary strategies.

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