

Zoo Conservation Outreach Group Scholarships

Reading the international scholarship testimonials in this month's *AZA Connect* magazine gives me a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment. This year's cohort of ZCOG-sponsored award recipients includes educators, biologists, and curators from zoological facilities in Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, and Chile. As indicated in their personal narratives, these future conservation leaders are using the information, skills and training obtained at AZA Professional Development Program courses to help address important animal management and wildlife conservation issues in their respective institutions and countries of origin. In addition, many of the award recipients are also developing new partnership initiatives with colleagues they met while attending the AZA training courses.

In 2005, Zoo Conservation Outreach Group (ZCOG) established the ZCOG Conservation Training Award to provide Latin American zoo and aquarium professionals with an opportunity to participate in AZA Professional Development Courses. Today, the group supports six of the seven international scholarship awards offered by AZA, including the Les Whitt Memorial Award, Cameron Park Zoo Amphibian Conservation Award, Dickerson Park Zoo Conservation Education Award, and Ellen Trout Zoo Crocodylian Conservation Award. Plans to sponsor additional scholarships are also in development.

Providing our Latin American colleagues with access to professional training opportunities promotes the exchange of information, ideas, and experiences, and helps build the connections that form the basis of successful conservation programs. ZCOG is proud to support this ongoing effort in partnership with AZA.

Daniel Hilliard, Ph.D.

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Chairperson, AZA Professional Development Committee Scholarship Task Force*

DICKERSON PARK ZOO CONSERVATION EDUCATION AWARD

Diana Carolina Casalins Petro



Colombia is considered by many to be the second most biodiverse country in the world, and it presently faces problems of extensive deforestation and illegal wildlife trafficking. I am very thankful to the Zoo Conservation Outreach Group and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) for awarding me the Dickerson Park Zoo Conservation Education Award, which provided me with an important training opportunity

when I attended the Conservation Education: Effective Program Design course. The program shared with us a number of successful education programs, which have taken place at different AZA's institutions, with emphasis on the "how to," and revealing current challenges in conservation education.

Guided by a team of energizing instructors, we had the chance to enhance our learning opportunities and mingle with the rest of the group. Back at my home institution in Colombia – the Baranquilla Zoo – I have been more confident in the design process of our current education campaign against illegal animal trafficking, and I have been able to enrich our internal team sessions with much of the dynamics learned at Wheeling. But it does not end there – while carrying out research on the design of animal ID labels, I contacted colleagues whom I met at the AZA Professional Development Program who helped me collect interesting materials. This has certainly been an invaluable experience in terms of knowledge, culture, contacts and shared experiences in the field.

ZOO CONSERVATION OUTREACH SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

Andrea Echeverry

Biologist, Fundación Botánica y Zoológica de Barranquilla (Barranquilla Zoo)



I went into the zoological field as a result of my final university practice (internship) at the Amphibian Laboratory of Cali Zoo (Colombia) in 2007, where I was developing a project involving the captive breeding of anoles. The work they do to save amphibians was so inspiring that when I started working

as an animal collection and research coordinator at Barranquilla Zoo (Colombia), I became interested in developing a holistic project to promote the conservation and research – both in field and at the Zoo – of many endemic and threatened frogs of the Caribbean Area of Colombia. The geographic area I want to focus on is from

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and Macuira (an isolated cloud, dwarf forest in the middle of the desert) National Natural Parks to the Magdalena and Guajira regions. This was a challenging task because we currently only keep one amphibian species in our collection.

Although I got some experience in captive husbandry and breeding of frogs during my internship, I felt I needed more training to be successful. For this reason, I thought about taking the Amphibian Biology, Conservation and Management Course held by AZA, and I decided to apply for the Zoo Conservation Outreach Group (ZCOG) scholarship.

For me, having been selected by ZCOG as the winner of the 2010 Conservation Training Award was really important, both personally and professionally. The opportunity to be at the Toledo Zoo for a week with the most recognized experts in the field, gave me the skills I needed to stimulate our institutional amphibian project.

Almost one month after taking the course, I applied to the Amphibian Ark Seeds Grant Program and won funding support. Since then, I have been continuously writing applications, setting partnerships, getting permits and all the things that one needs to develop a conservation project.

The time at Toledo not only gave me immediate knowledge related to amphibians, it also gave me some lovely friends and institutional contacts, whom I can write at any moment asking for advice and support, friends I hope and plan to work with in the future.

This was an amazing experience for me as a biologist – it let me grow in my career and most important of all, it taught me how I really could help amphibians.

Thanks ZCOG for this great opportunity.

CAMERON PARK ZOO AMPHIBIAN CONSERVATION AWARD

Cybele Lisboa

Biologist, Fundação Parque Zoológico de São Paulo



Over the last two years, the Fundação Parque Zoológico de São Paulo (Sao Paulo Zoo) has shown a significant increase in its amphibian collection and in developing projects that target amphibian conservation. Among these projects, two of them are pioneered in Brazil: one is an exhibit only for amphibians and the other is an *ex-situ* conservation program for a critically endangered species, *Scinax alcatraz*. The maintenance of amphibians in captivity still is a new area in Brazil and much

of the husbandry techniques are unknown by professionals. As the curator of amphibians of this institution, my participation at the Amphibian Biology, Conservation and Management course, which was only possible because I received a Cameron Park Zoo Amphibian Conservation Award, was extremely important. Through this generous scholarship, I learned techniques to apply with our species, to improve our husbandry, and to ensure the animals' welfare and the projects' continuity.