



AZA White Paper

Children Speak Out: Special Earth Day Report on Aza's Poll for the Planet

"Although there have been great strides in and some notable successes in species conservation, we believe we're still losing habitats and species faster than we're saving them."

– Dr. Bruce Carr, Director
of Conservation Education,
AZA

"The one process that is now going on that will take millions of years to correct is the loss of genetic and species diversity by the destruction of natural habitats. This is the folly our descendants are least likely to forgive us."

– Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, Earth Day, April 22, 2003, marks the release of the results of *Aza's* Poll for the Planet, which was conducted by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) to learn what children think about their planet.

And children responded.

To date, nearly 60,000 respondents have taken *Aza's* Poll for the Planet. The results reveal a deep need for an international leader in conservation and conservation education.

Results show that:

- Children are keenly aware of the environmental problems facing our planet
- Children believe volunteerism can save the planet
- Children believe that they *themselves* are a potent force for saving the planet
- Children want information and opportunities for action. They want to know what they can do to help. They also want to know: *Who is helping? What is being done? What is working?*

These children are asking for information, direction, leadership—and the opportunity to make a difference.

The poll is not a scientific research study. It is, however, the powerful first step in a dialogue with children, the future caretakers of the planet.

Conclusion: *Children Want to Help*

The findings of *Aza's* Poll for the Planet demonstrate that, while children are concerned about the health of our planet, they are eager to help save it. A powerful statement of self-empowerment, children believe they *themselves* are helping to save the planet, after zoos and aquariums, volunteers and scientists, and before the government, public service, teachers, or people in the media or on the Internet.

Zoos and aquariums scored high among all ages and sexes in playing a significant role in caring for the planet and educating the public about issues facing the planet. Although this result is not surprising given the location where many of the polls were taken, this broad regard suggests a still greater potential for zoos and aquariums in the creation and promotion of new programs that provide meaningful opportunities for children and volunteers.

Recommendations: *Provide Opportunities for Involvement*

Analysis of the poll suggests that the critical time for children to bond with nature and transform their interest into active involvement lies in the pre-teen years. If they have opportunities to participate in conservation efforts before their interest plateaus in the early teen years, they will be ready to help again in two to four years.

What they need now are meaningful and affirming opportunities for getting involved.

Continuing the Dialogue: *Who Will Lead?*

The main purpose of this report is to facilitate an ongoing dialogue among children, scientists, educators, and leaders from the public and private sector on how best to provide children with the knowledge, leadership and meaningful opportunities for action that they want and need to become effective stewards of the planet.

We promised the children we would honor their voices by sharing their responses to the poll with leaders in all fields and by challenging those leaders to answer their concerns.

AZA asked; kids answered; will leaders respond?