

Volunteers: Critical to Taronga Zoo

By Wendy Year 6



The animals inside the closure are being looked after by zoo volunteers.

Taronga zookeepers are the backbone that keep the zoo running but that's not enough. That is where volunteers come in.

Volunteers are a vital component to ensuring the smooth running of the world renowned, Taronga Zoo. Their volunteer program that sees hundreds of Australians volunteer their time throughout the year, benefits the zoo in providing better service for visitors. In particular, they assist at the zoo by performing a number of tasks which helps to free up the zoo keepers to work more closely with the animals for conservation purposes and visitor shows.

They help through a number of different activities including, guiding visitors and assisting with general inquiries of tourists as they wander the park. They help feed animals, perform animal encounters and deliver "spot talks" at specific animal enclosures along the way.

"We have lots of roles; some of them are taking people on tours around the zoo and telling about the animals. We meet and greet people and we give them maps and we give them directions," Susan Barisic from Taronga Zoo's volunteer program said.

Interesting Facts:

5.8 million

Number of volunteers in Australia in 2014 who volunteered

30.6%

Percentage of 2014 volunteers from NSW.

18.9%

Percentage of 2014 volunteers aged 85 and over.

A variety of exiting roles are available at Taronga Zoo.

In 2014 the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that of the 5.8 million people who volunteered, the largest group (41.6%) were aged 15 to 17. Taronga Zoo has found an ingenious way to tap into this area. Teenagers eager to volunteer at the zoo can sign up for the Youth at the Zoo program where they participate in numerous activities both inside and outside of the zoo. In May 2016, members from Taronga's Youth at the Zoo volunteered their time in the Capertee Valley, planting trees in the name of Regent Honeyeater conservation.



Young volunteers from Taronga at Capertee Valley giving up their time to help the environment.

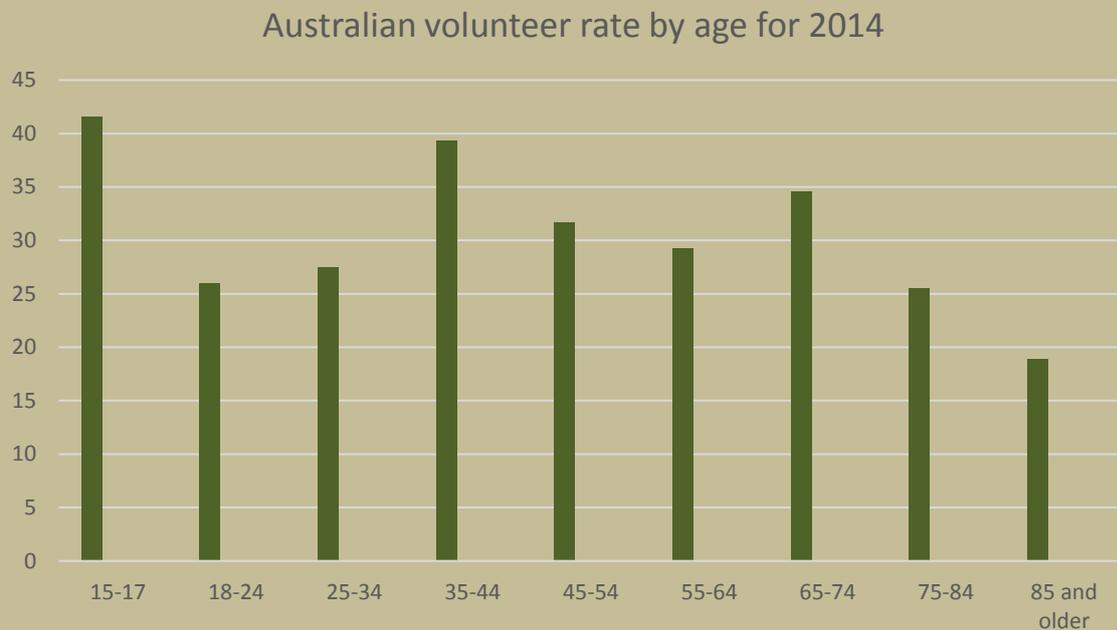
Taronga's volunteer programs encourage others to take positive actions for the conservation wildlife and their environments.

"The thing that has been very good for me to learn is about the conservation Taronga does. Not just about people visiting animals. We [Taronga] do lots and lots of other programs away from the zoo. We're helping conserve the environment and helping animals so that they will breed and live and be multiplied out there in the world," Susan Barisic said.

Whilst the younger generation are volunteering in higher numbers, there are still a large proportion of older Australians who are lending their support, especially at Taronga Zoo.

"Our longest working volunteer is Gloria Bradley who was here right from the beginning when the program started in 1977. Gloria's been here for 43 years and is a very experienced volunteer and guide around the zoo and really loves her job, so there are many volunteers who've been here for many, many years and we hope they stay with us for many, many more years, plus people who've just started recently, who are just learning about the volunteer program," Susan Barisic said.

Guest Experience Volunteers provide information about the zoo and its animals to visitors. Helping out at social events, conducting surveys and assisting with crowd control is some of the ways they lend their support to Taronga Zoo.



There are a number of other volunteer options available at Taronga Zoo. Education Volunteers support visitor education, assisting with administration of Taronga’s large student education programs. They guide school students and assist with their research whilst on excursions at Taronga Zoo. Short term volunteers are needed regularly especially during special events or over peak periods. Bush regeneration volunteers assist the Taronga staff with bush regeneration, mainly of their native bushland properties.

To become a volunteer at Taronga Zoo isn’t easy. You have to go through detailed training to become one.

“We have at the moment about 600 volunteers across all the different areas of the zoo. We have volunteers who work for keepers, who can work in administration and we gain extra volunteers for special events like our Centenary,” Susan Barisic said.

“We’re always open to having people come and learn how to become a volunteer at the zoo. It’s a great job,” Susan Barisic said.

There are many benefits of volunteering at Taronga Zoo and other worthy Australian organisations. It is a wonderful way to get involved in the community or contribute to a cause people are passionate about. It provides a chance to make new friends whilst learning new skills.

“I just retired from being school principal which is a pretty heavy job and I had lots of time and I also loved animals and I love Taronga Zoo. I thought that if I could come and work as a volunteer I might be able to do something for the animals, something for the zoo,” Susan Barisic said.

Volunteers are vital to Taronga Zoo. They help make the zoo experience memorable and educational for the millions of visitors from all over the world who walk through their gates each year.