



**RIO GRANDE ZOO, ALBUQUERQUE AQUARIUM, and  
RIO GRANDE BOTANIC GARDEN  
BIOPARK VOLUNTEER TEACHER  
JOB DESCRIPTION 2009**

The mission of Albuquerque Biological Park (BioPark) Education is to teach about the diversity and interdependence of life and inspire a sense of stewardship for the earth. Volunteer teachers, called **docents**, enable the BioPark to fulfill its education mission.

Docents utilize the Albuquerque Aquarium, Rio Grande Botanic Garden, Rio Grande Zoo and Tingley Beach as a teaching resource by focusing on all the habitats represented and species exhibited. Docents are critical to the mission because they bring a knowledgeable and personal connection to thousands of people each year, both on-grounds and through outreach.

**REQUIREMENTS** Anyone over 18 years old is eligible. Skills needed include enthusiasm, a commitment to teaching conservation, a sense of responsibility, flexibility and patience. The required knowledge is taught. As a safety precaution, all volunteers are required to submit to a City of Albuquerque background check before they can begin volunteering.

**DUTIES** Docents perform a variety of duties, depending on personal interest. Examples of BioPark-wide duties are listed below, followed by facility-specific duties. Ideas for other duties are welcome; however, you must be willing to help implement them! Duties are available 7 days a week unless otherwise noted.

***All BioPark docents can:***

- Offer BioPark visitors the chance to experience the wonder of nature through on-grounds Discovery Stations. When doing a Discovery Station, a volunteer is stationed near an exhibit and uses biofacts to engage visitors in a dialogue. Depending on the facility, biofacts may include education animals, animal pelts, shark skin, urchin spines, tree rings, dried roots, or insect specimens. Through the sense of touch and guided by conversation, visitors are encouraged to discover conservation concepts for themselves. Examples of some Discovery Station topics are Endangered Species, Polar Bears, Elephants, Sharks and Sea Turtles.
- Interpret the BioPark for visitors through guided tours or informal mini-tours. Guided tours are offered to organized groups such as schools, churches, and community clubs and must be scheduled in advance.
- Bring the wonders of the BioPark to local classrooms and organizations. Teaching tools may include biofacts, slides and education animals. BioPark outreach programs are conducted for children and adults.
- Take additional training classes (offered seasonally) to become a Tingley Beach Docent. Tingley Docents teach about local flora and fauna found in Albuquerque's bosque and New Mexico's wetlands. They may participate in fishing clinics, night time guided tours and children's classes.

## DUTIES (cont'd)

### ***Sample duties specific to the Rio Grande Zoo include:***

- Travel around New Mexico on a zoomobile teaching about animals and conservation. The Zoo To You van travels for four weekdays at a time and is staffed by two volunteers. The New Mexico BioPark Society (NMBPS) provides funds for its operation and expenses.

The Zoo to You van is free of charge and visits any community in New Mexico that requests it, no matter how small. Site visits include schools, senior citizen homes, libraries and county fairs. Hour-long presentations, consisting of slide shows, education animals and biofacts, are made to groups. Training for new docents on the Zoo to You van will be in January 2010.

- Introduce Albuquerque-area school children to the animal kingdom using local Zoo to You biofacts, education animals and slides. Volunteers present a program developed for kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade and then bring the concepts to life by allowing the children to see Zoo biofacts up-close and interact with the education animals brought into the classroom. Adult outreach programs are also available.
- Enable Zoo visitors to touch an alpaca or llama. Alpacas and llamas are walked around the Zoo park regularly. Other education demonstration animals include an African crested porcupine, serval, kestrel and macaw. A variety of other birds and small mammals are available for on-grounds Discovery Stations.

### ***Sample duties specific to the Rio Grande Botanic Garden include:***

- Teach in the Desert and Mediterranean Conservatories. Explain the adaptations of plants that grow in these arid climates and teach about the characteristics and fragility of these unique habitats. Help connect visitors with the plants that provide food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and more.
- Highlight specific plants. Docents with in-depth knowledge about roses, cacti, or other plants represented at the Garden will be encouraged to share their expertise with interested visitors at the appropriate exhibit.
- Involve visitors in hands-on gardening experiences. Choose your own topic or use seed strips, mystery seed kits and seed balls.
- Connect visitors to the land by taking them to the 1920s-1930s era Heritage Farm exhibit. Talk with visitors about traditional crops and farm animals. Demonstrate wool working, canning and cooking techniques.
- Teach about the interdependence of life and the many animals (from bees to butterflies to bullfrogs) that live in the gardens.
- Teach about invertebrate diversity on grounds and in outreach programs using animals and exhibits from the Insectarium. Volunteers will have access to a diverse collection of live invertebrates such as Giant Millipedes, Madagascar Hissing Cockroaches, tarantulas, scorpions, and water beetles to help educate people about insect adaptations and how important they are to our environment and the web of life.

***Sample duties specific to the Albuquerque Aquarium include:***

- Teach visitors about the natural history of aquatic environments (Rio Grande, Gulf of Mexico, Coral Reef and Atlantic Ocean) and their connection and importance to us in the desert. Provide examples to visitors about the importance of animals (i.e., sharks, sea turtles) in marine ecosystems.
- Assist visitors with identification of marine life, including animals found in coral reef and deep ocean tanks, pointing out similarities and differences between species.
- Teach about tidepool inhabitants at the Touchpool in the aquarium. Invertebrates are available for supervised touching by visitors when a volunteer is available to explain the animal's natural history. A mini-touchpool travels as part of Aquarium outreach programs.
- Teach about sharks and rays at the Shark/Ray Encounter exhibit where visitors are allowed to touch these animals under the supervision of our volunteers.
- Teach visitors about animals in the ocean tank during daily feedings. Narrate the process by which divers feed the Aquarium animals while explaining the natural history of eels, stingrays, porcupine fish and more!

**MINIMUM TIME**

Volunteers create their own schedule. They may work anytime the Zoo, Aquarium, or Botanic Garden are open, 9:00am-5:00pm, seven days a week, year round. A regular weekly schedule is encouraged, but not required.

A minimum of 60 hours a year is required to receive recognition as a docent. At least 30 hours of these must be spent directly teaching the public; the remaining 30 hours may also be spent directly teaching the public or doing support work such as research, writing, attending monthly meetings, continuing education classes and Brown Bags, assisting with general BioPark projects, etc. Volunteers are responsible for tracking their own hours on an honor system.

**TRAINING**

Docent training takes place on thirteen Thursdays. Phase I includes eleven Thursdays, beginning August 13 and ending December 10. Most training days are 9:30am-3:30pm. Phase II is on two Thursdays in January 2010. (Please see the "Pertinent Dates" section on the last page for specific training dates.)

Phase I topics are taught by Zoo, Garden, and Aquarium staff and cover such subjects as habitats, ecology and conservation, basic biological concepts, and natural history of the species on exhibit at each facility. During Phase I, trainees will work on-grounds with experienced docents to practice what they have learned. Three of the eleven Thursdays are designed for individual small groups, called study teams, to work together doing observations, research, and a group project.

Phase II topics cover such subjects as teaching strategies, how to use biofacts, and logistics of volunteering at the BioPark.

Please bring your lunch on training days, and come prepared for indoor and outdoor learning. Wear comfortable walking shoes.

In order to be an effective docent, the information taught in the training must be learned. Attendance is required, although up to 3 missed classes can be made up by watching the video of the class and working with staff to cover the missed material.

A final exam is administered and must be passed (if necessary, it can be retaken). BioPark Education has many ways to support and assist trainees as they learn. If requested, staff or experienced docents will provide coaching.

**UNIFORM**

Docents wear a printed fabric vest worn with the uniform colors. It is the responsibility of the docent to buy the vest fabric from BioPark Education and get the vest made.

The identification badge and nametag provided at graduation must be worn as part of the uniform. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to acquire the solid-colored blouse/shirt and pants/shorts/skirt in the uniform colors. Uniform colors are black, brown, beige, or white.

**BENEFITS**

Volunteers have the opportunity to do meaningful and gratifying education work with thousands of visitors to the BioPark, an important intangible benefit.

Tangible benefits are also available. Upon completion of the training and a commitment to give the minimum number of hours, volunteers are given an identification badge, which allows free regular admission to all BioPark facilities (Zoo, Aquarium, and Botanic Garden). While on duty, volunteers receive a discount at the food and gift concession stands. After the end of each calendar year, volunteers are awarded recognition items for their service. Volunteers are offered discounts to all fee-based BioPark Education programs and are invited to special volunteer-only events.

**SUPPORT**

Resources exist throughout the BioPark to help volunteers fulfill their duties. Experienced docents are eager to help new volunteers and are enthusiastic about sharing their own knowledge. Education staff can provide assistance, and small Education Libraries are available. Monthly education meetings are generally held on the first Thursday and first Saturday of each month, and new volunteers are encouraged to attend beginning in September (Sept. 10 and 12). The Zoo education meetings are at 9:00am in the Zoo Education Barn and the Aquarium/Botanic Garden (AQ/BG) meetings are at 11:00am in the AQ/BG Education Building. Current BioPark happenings are discussed as well as facility-specific information. Volunteers are also invited to attend monthly Brown Bag Seminars following the meetings. Mid-month, a written update is mailed to all BioPark volunteers. Information on current happenings is also available on the bulletin boards at both Education facilities.

Another support resource for trainees is the docent mentor team. The mentors are available to you to answer questions, show you around the BioPark, take you along as they teach so you can observe volunteers "in action," and offer general guidance throughout your training.

**COSTS**

Docent out-of-pocket expenses are phased in over the course of training and include a training manual, group project, guidebook, and uniform vest costs, as well as a key deposit for Zoo docents. At the beginning of training, docents are responsible for buying the training manual (\$20); during training, docents are responsible for any costs associated with the group project (\$0 - \$10); and at the end of training, docents are responsible for buying a guidebook which gives species information (\$15). Docents are responsible for acquiring their own vest uniform (material cost is \$12/yard). Zoo docents need to put a refundable deposit down for the key to the Zoo Education Barn (\$10.00). The deposit for the key will be refunded when the Zoo docent resigns and the key is returned.

**ORGANIZATION**

Zoo docents report to the Zoo Education Coordinator, Allyson Zahm, Aquarium and Garden docents report to the Aquarium and Garden Education Coordinator, Dave Karrmann. The Education staff works very closely with the BioPark.

The Education Clerks, Lori Powdrell at the Zoo and Lee Ann Rivera at the AQ/BG, are also available to provide assistance.

## PERTINENT DATES

A general orientation will be **Thursday, August 6, at 11:00am** in the Colores Building at the Rio Grande Zoo. The purpose of the orientation is to describe all volunteer teaching programs and other volunteer opportunities, at no obligation to the attendee. The orientation will last approximately one hour. Volunteers who are ready to commit to the docent training program can turn in their application and purchase their manual at this orientation.

The specific dates for training are listed below. You may train for only one facility at a time; however, you are welcome to train at another facility in future years.

The dates below are not concurrent. The “empty” weeks are designed to give you time to read, study, spend time on grounds, and attend other events at the BioPark. On most training days, you will meet with your class at your facility. See below for exceptions.

Phase I (**Zoo & Aquarium**) – August 13\*, August 27, September 3, September 17, September 24, October 8, October 22, October 29, November 12, November 19\*, December 10

Phase I (**Botanic Garden**) – August 13\*, August 20, September 3, September 17, September 24, October 8, October 15, October 22, October 29, November 19\*, December 10

Phase II (**Zoo & Aquarium**) – January 14\*, January 21

Phase II (**Botanic Garden**) – January 14\*, January 28

*\* All classes meet together at the Zoo Ed. Colores Building on these dates.*

## NEXT STEP

If you want to become a volunteer teacher, you can:

- Bring your application paperwork to the BioPark volunteer orientation on Thursday, August 6, at 11:00am, in the Colores Building at the Zoo. Tell the Zoo cashier you are here for the volunteer orientation to gain admittance. You may purchase your training manual at this time and begin reading before the first day of class.
- You can also just come to the *first day* of training on Thursday, August 13, 9:30am in the Colores Building at the Zoo. Either bring the completed application with you or be prepared to fill it out that day.

If you are not *certain* that you would like to become a volunteer, but are *interested*, please attend the orientation at no obligation to find out more and learn about other volunteer options.

## CONTACT

For more information, contact BioPark Education:  
(505) 764-6214  
[www.cabq.gov/biopark](http://www.cabq.gov/biopark)



The BioPark is a division of the City of Albuquerque's Cultural Services Department. For general information, please call (505) 768-2000 or 311 locally, Relay NM or 711, or visit [www.cabq.gov/biopark](http://www.cabq.gov/biopark).