

RIVERBANKS
ZOO CREW

Handbook
2026-2027

IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION

Andrea Robichaud

Andrea, Zoo Education Specialist, leads ZooCrew activities for Saturday participants. Andrea is in the office Tuesdays–Saturdays from 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

E: arobichaud@riverbanks.org P: 803.602.0897

Kaela Sanborn

Kaela, Zoo Education Specialist, leads ZooCrew activities for Homeschool Monday participants. Kaela is in the office Sundays–Thursdays from 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

E: ksanborn@riverbanks.org P: 803.602.0846

Alma Ruffin

Alma, Zoo Education Manager, provides supervision to the specialists and ZooCrew programming. Alma is available to answer any questions or concerns. Alma is in the office Mondays–Fridays, 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.

E: aruffin@riverbanks.org P: 803.602.0885

Joy Knotts

Joy is the Education Services Assistant and helps support ZooCrew participants with registration and payment questions. Joy is in the office Mondays–Fridays from 8:00 a.m.–3:30 p.m.

E: Education@Riverbanks.org P: 803.602.0803

RUNNING LATE? LAST MINUTE NEEDS?

Riverbanks Education Cell Phone P: 803.904.1274

Riverbanks Main Line P: 803.779.8717

TAX ID #56-0946437

IMPORTANT DATES

Meeting dates and other important events are listed below. Staff will notify families as soon as possible in the case of additional opportunities not listed below or unanticipated changes to the schedule.

August

31st (*Virtual Family Orientation Meeting*
9:15 a.m.–10:15 a.m.)

September

14th ZooCrew Meeting
28th ZooCrew Meeting

October

12th ZooCrew Meeting
26th ZooCrew Meeting

November

9th ZooCrew Meeting
23rd ZooCrew Meeting

December

7th Winter Celebration

January

4th ZooCrew Meeting
18th **ZooCrew** Meeting

February

1st ZooCrew Meeting
15th **ZooCrew** Meeting

March

1st ZooCrew Meeting
15th ZooCrew Meeting

April

5th ZooCrew Meeting
19th ZooCrew Meeting

May

1st Presentations & End of Year
Celebration (3:30 p.m.–5:00 p.m.)
This is a Saturday Evening event.

SCHEDULE

ZooCrew will operate on an annual schedule, from September to May. Meetings will take place bi-weekly. Participants have the option to register for Saturday AM session (8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.), Saturday PM session (1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.) or for Homeschool Mondays (9:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.), based on their availability.

WHAT IS ZOOCREW?

Animals inspire curiosity and wonder in all of us. At ZooCrew, we use this natural interest to foster curiosity about science and conservation while helping participants build peer connections, develop personal conservation interests, and understand how zoos and botanical gardens contribute to protecting wildlife.

This year-long program will engage ZooCrew participants in a cohort of peers in project-based learning. Hands-on activities, guest speakers, exploration of the Riverbanks campus and up-close experiences with animals and habitats will support participants' growth and learning.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT TO DO IN ZOOCREW?

- Participate in team building, group discussions, and cooperative learning.
- Discover conservation issues facing wildlife and ways you can help.
- Learn how zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens are contributing to protecting wildlife.
- Discover new things about Riverbanks' campus, staff, plants and animals through observations, behind-the-scenes experiences, and guest speakers.
- Pursue explorations of topics you are interested in and practice new communication skills to share your passion with others.
- Build a community of middle schoolers who are interested in wildlife conservation and science.

COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS AND EXPECTATIONS

ZooCrew participants are vital members of a community of peers and staff who work and learn together. They will learn the value of collaboration, growing from mistakes, peer communication and how to support their community in positive ways. Within this community, each participant will be treated with respect.

Riverbanks ZooCrew strives to provide a community that welcomes and celebrates the unique needs, culture, and identities of each participant. We seek to provide all participants with the tools they need to succeed. If you would like Riverbanks staff to be aware of anything to help us provide a more inclusive environment, please notify us.

STAFF

Riverbanks ZooCrew is based on high-quality practices of both science and environmental education. Our teaching staff members are accomplished scientists and educators with a passion for promoting conservation values. ZooCrew staff work collaboratively with various Riverbanks' staff during the year. Qualified Riverbanks education staff will serve as substitutes in any instance of an unexpected staff absence. The participant-to-instructor ratio is 8:1.

COMMUNICATION

Communication between staff and participant families is an essential part of our program. Methods of communication may include newsletters, emails, phone calls, texts, and individual conversations. Any personal information will be discussed in a private, professional manner, when necessary.

PARTICIPANT SAFETY

Riverbanks Zoo and Garden requires that participants are properly **signed in and out** by an approved guardian each day. Participants will not be released to anyone other than those adults authorized to pick them up on the sign-out sheet. Please be prepared to show photo identification at pick-up. If there is a change of pick-up, please submit that information in writing at the beginning of the day. A ZooCrew T-shirt will be provided to each participant the first week of programming. For safety and identification, **ZooCrew T-shirts and closed-toed shoes are required** for participation. We recommend dressing in layers or bringing a jacket to be prepared for indoor and outdoor activities. If a student forgets their ZooCrew shirt, an additional shirt will be provided for them and a \$20 fee charged to the account.

Please discourage participants from bringing items of value OR money to the zoo. Riverbanks is not responsible for lost or broken items.

Cell phone use is not permitted during the program unless for a planned activity (Ex. Goosechase Scavenger Hunt or iNaturalist app). Participants will only be allowed to use a cell phone before or after the program.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

ZooCrew staff are First Aid, CPR, AED, and EpiPen certified to assist in the event of an injury or illness. If a participant becomes ill or is severely injured, the emergency contact will be contacted to pick up the participant immediately. Participants should not plan to attend if they have any of the following symptoms within 24 hours of their program date: green mucus, consistent cough, fever, undiagnosed rash, pink eye, lice, vomiting, or diarrhea.

TUITION PAYMENTS

Monthly tuition is \$66.25 for Riverbanks members and \$81.25 for non-members. An annual registration fee of \$50 will be collected at the time of registration. While tuition is paid on a monthly basis, it is not based on a daily or monthly fee, but an annual tuition that is divided up for your convenience. Therefore, full tuition is due each month regardless of holidays, breaks, or absences.

Your monthly tuition payment is due in full by the 15th of the prior month. A \$5 late fee will apply to all payments received after the 15th of that month. If you become two tuition payments behind, participants will not be able to attend until the past due amount is paid in full. If you are in need of temporary financial assistance, please contact the Education Services Assistant.

LATE PICK-UP POLICY

Riverbanks Education department has a late pick-up fee for any participant left longer than 15 minutes at the end of a meeting. The late fee is \$15.00 after this courtesy time and \$1.00 per minute, thereafter. Late fees will be charged to the participant's account and are due with the next month's payment.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY

Withdrawals must be received in writing by the 10th of the preceding month. The annual registration fee is non-refundable. Cancellations received after the 10th of the preceding month will be charged a month's tuition but will not be liable for future payments.

ABSENCE POLICY

If a student is unable to attend a meeting for any reason, please contact the Riverbanks Education team as soon as reasonably possible (see Important Contact Information above). Please also notify us of any contagious illnesses as appropriate.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

Meetings or events may be canceled due to dangerous weather conditions. Every effort will be made to cancel these events in a timely manner and contact all participants and guardians as quickly as possible. If a weather emergency occurs during a program, all ZooCrew students will be taken into a secure shelter immediately. Students will not be taken outside and released from Riverbanks until the dangerous weather has passed.

If Riverbanks Zoo and Garden is closed, ZooCrew will not meet. If Riverbanks closes during a meeting, the meeting will be cut short and students will be sent home. Education staff will not leave Riverbanks until each student is safely headed home.