



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cochrane, Ontario – November 24, 2014

Kapuskasung Students Help to Enrich the Lives of Polar Bears

Two of the Cochrane Polar Bear Habitat's goals are to raise the standard of care for polar bears in captive facilities, and to educate the public about polar bears and how we can help them. By offering a program to students on creating enrichments (stimulating activities), the Habitat is able to accomplish both objectives.

Conservation Coordinator Dylan McCart brainstormed the program on the premise that the chance to work with live polar bears would not only engage the students, but create a life-lasting environmental impression.

"We ask the students to work together, and create their own enrichment item that will not only occupy the bear's time but to stimulate natural behaviours that would be seen in the wild. Each enrichment idea is documented through videos and pictures, then recorded in a behavioural log. The bear keepers provide a critique of each idea and the students use our guidance to increase the effectiveness of the enrichment item."

An example of one of the class enrichment ideas is available for viewing at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zezJ3MhygRc&list=UUfmWpV3aL92CfJOClFYWQQ>.

When teacher Angelina Tremblay at St. Patrick's French Immersion school in Kapuskasing heard about the chance for her students to talk directly to Bear Keepers and work with live polar bears through Skype calls and video, she was intrigued. "We loved both the live feeds and seeing the video. The kids couldn't wait to see if the bears liked their ideas."

The St. Patrick's Grade 4, 5 and 6 students were divided up into groups, each coming up with different plans. As the students were French Immersion, bi-lingual Bear Keeper, Mireille Caron presented the classes. When the Bear Keepers said they'd definitely be doing one of the enrichments again, the students were very excited. "They loved it and learned a lot," claimed Tremblay. "One of the things they didn't realize was that polar bears live longer in captivity than in the wild."

Polar Bear Habitat Manager Karen Cummings said the program is a win-win. "The program was created to give students a chance to learn about the importance of Polar bears in captivity and the role they play in creating a sustainable polar bear future. What we've learned in the process is that the students are amazingly creative. They've already given our Keepers some great ideas that benefit the bears."

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