

Young Naturalist Program Info Letter

Dear Potential Young Naturalist and Parent:

Thank you for your interest in the Young Naturalist Volunteer Program! The Young Naturalist program is an extremely successful, experience-based volunteer program for youth between the ages of 13 and 17.

Young Naturalists play a key role in assisting the Nature Center staff by helping to educate the public, as well as providing basic care for some resident animals. Here at the Nature Center, we take pride in our work and would like to share that pride with you so that we can continue to provide excellent experiences for our visitors. In order to accomplish this goal, we will provide participants with the best training and guidance we can offer.

Applicants should be... *interested, dedicated, mature, motivated, willing to learn and step outside of comfort zones, and able to follow directions*. Participants will be challenged to expand their knowledge of the animal species at the Nature Center and how these animals are connected to each other and the people that share their homes. The knowledge and experience that participants gain will directly correlate to the amount of energy they put into the program.

The Nature Center receives an average of over 40,000 visitors throughout the summer. The Young Naturalists will assist visitors at specific stations located at the most popular sites on the grounds. Participants will rotate through these stations during each shift.

The decision to become a Young Naturalist will require more than just the participant's commitment. It will involve the entire family since transportation will need to be coordinated, as well as the organization of everyone's time.

In order to help you decide if the Young Naturalist Volunteer Program is a good fit, please read the following list of program components.

Requirements for Applicants

- All participants must be at least *thirteen* years old by the program start date. No exceptions.
- Participants must be self-motivated, respectful and willing to help out.
- Participants must speak to the public and engage passing visitors.
- Participants will handle reptiles for guests. Participants will perform tasks vital to the well being of select animals, including cleaning and basic upkeep of animal spaces. Participants must be prepared to learn these skills and be willing to carry them out.

- Participants must be actively involved in developing their interest in wildlife and livestock by using downtime (when there are no visitors and all animal care is completed) to explore personal interest areas. Resources for this will be made available.

Program Dates and Times

- The Young Naturalist Program generally runs from **the second Saturday in June through the second Friday in August** (about 9 weeks).
- Each Young Naturalist will be assigned a specific shift to work throughout the summer (e.g. Wednesday-PM or Friday-AM etc.).
- Six Young Naturalists will be scheduled for each shift - two shifts per day, 7 days a week.
- Shifts will run from 9:45 am to 1:15 pm and from 1:00 pm to 4:30 pm.

Time Commitment

- To successfully complete the program, Young Naturalists will be asked to provide a **minimum of 28 hours of service** throughout the summer. This is equivalent to 8 shifts and does not include the mandatory orientation session(s).
- It is crucial that participants are prompt, including arriving **no more than ten minutes early**.
- To ensure safety, all participants must be picked up directly after each shift.

Program Fee

- To cover the cost of program materials, including a t-shirt (Young Naturalists will be required to wear a volunteer t-shirt during every work shift), a program fee of \$20.00 must be **paid upon acceptance to the program (please *do not* send a check with the application)**.
- The program fee is non-refundable and is required before you can participate in the program.

Description of Duties

The primary responsibility of a Young Naturalist will be to engage visitors at multiple stations throughout the Center. Participants will rotate through the stations during each shift. Stations change a little each year, but may include:

- The **Meet-a-Reptile Station** enables participants to work with reptiles (snakes and turtles), sharing their ecology and biology with our guests in a hands-on experience, and provide basic care for our education collection of reptiles

and amphibians. *Our Young Naturalists will only handle select non-venomous snakes and turtles.*

- At the **Prehistoric Appalachians Station**, Young Nats will present real 3D printed fossils from Gray Fossil Site, TN to guests. You will help guests imagine what life was like in the Southern Appalachians 4.5 million years ago. You will help guests understand why we have red pandas (they are the only surviving relative of our own prehistoric Bristol's Appalachian panda!).
- The **Yearly Rotating Station** changes from year to year. In the past, we have done citizen science, BioFact Bingo, and gardening.

Applications

Interested participants must complete the appropriate application packet in full. Note that there are **separate applications** for *new participants* and *returning participants*. Please enclose all application materials as noted at the end of each application. Incomplete applications may not be considered.

The requested photo will be used to gain familiarity with participants, thus enabling staff members to better assist Young Naturalists. The photo will not be used to determine acceptance or posted in a public area. The photo will not be returned. A **current and candid photo helps us the most.**

Completed application packets must be received by the deadline to be given full consideration.

We encourage double-sided printing of the application packet in order to conserve trees and file space. Only the application packet and necessary components need to be submitted (i.e. not this letter).

Selection

Due to the popularity of the Young Naturalist Program, the Nature Center may not be able to accommodate all applicants. Enrollment is limited to ensure a quality program.

- Applications will be reviewed in the order in which they are received. Prospective candidates will be evaluated based on completeness of application, quality of submitted materials, availability, and previous performance in the program, if applicable.
- Prospective candidates may be added to a waiting list if the number of applicants exceeds capacity.
- Applicants will be notified of their program status VIA EMAIL by mid-May.

Orientation

All accepted participants will be required to attend ***mandatory*** training sessions in order to participate in the program. Dates are listed on the application. Both new and returning participants **must attend training sessions**.

Further Information

A confirmation packet containing details pertaining to the orientation sessions, the uniform, policies and procedures will be sent to accepted applicants and their parents/guardians.

A Young Naturalist Program Manual will be given to each Young Naturalist at the orientation sessions. A copy of this manual is available for reference at the Nature Center during normal business hours: 10:00 am until 5:00 pm every day.

If you have any questions, please contact the Teen Program Coordinator, Alayna Schmidt at **(828) 259-8085** or **aschmidt@ashevillenc.gov**.