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TORONTO ZOO PULLS TOGETHER IN SUPPORT OF INTERNATIONAL BIODIVERSITY DAY The Great Garlic Mustard Pull

Friday, May 22, 2009, Toronto, Ontario: This afternoon, the Toronto Zoo celebrated what has been proclaimed as the International Day for Biological Diversity (IDB) to help increase understanding and awareness of biodiversity issues. In keeping with the theme for 2009's IDB, "Invasive Alien Species," Toronto Zoo hosted one of 24 province-wide "Great Garlic Mustard Pulls" onsite. The invasive species (known as garlic mustard) was removed from throughout the Zoo site with the generous help of over 60 volunteers collectively from Toronto Zoo, Evergreen™, LEAF, Seaton House, TELUS, Citizen Scientists and University of Toronto Scarborough Campus. In total, half a ton of garlic mustard was removed in one day. Following the pulling of the garlic mustard, there was also a ceremonial tree planting that took place in the Zoo's Core Woods, where an "eastern redbud" was planted to symbolize the restoration of our forests. On hand for this event were Councillor Raymond Cho, Chair, Zoo Board of Management, Alan Crook, Chair, Biodiversity Education & Awareness Network (BEAN) and Dr. William Rapley, Executive Director of Conservation, Education and Research, Toronto Zoo.

Our 287 hectare site is home to a few invasive plants and animals, including garlic mustard, whose populations are growing at alarming rates, making Toronto Zoo well aware of the threat of invasive alien species. For example, the tall wetland grass "Phragmites" has recently moved in with vigour, and the incredibly fertile dog-strangling vine plant is a dominant threat to all biodiversity in the Rouge Park.

"Today's garlic mustard pull is important in sustaining our environment," says Dave Ireland, Curator of Conservation, Toronto Zoo. "Invasive species can choke out local plants and animals, even taking over entire landscapes. By conducting this annual event it allows the Toronto Zoo, as well as other local groups, the opportunity to begin to restore the spaces that are most important to each community."

The garlic mustard event was actually modeled after a pilot project started at the Toronto Zoo in 2008 where community partner Evergreen™ and the Zoo pulled over 350 kg of garlic mustard from our Core Woods. Garlic mustard and other non-native invasive woodland plants compete with native tree seedlings, like sugar maple and beech. The understory of a healthy woodland in Ontario should be blanketed with native tree seedlings. However, what can be seen in infected areas are very few tree seedlings and a carpet of garlic mustard. By pulling this weed and replacing (or in other words restoring) it with native trees and shrubs we are effectively supporting our local woodlands.

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Current Zoo Hours and New Admission Prices

Current Zoo Hours: 9:00am to 7:30pm. Last admission is one hour before closing. General Admission 13-64 incl. is \$21, Children 3 and under are free, Children 4-12 are \$13 and Seniors 65+ are \$15. Parking \$8. Events and admission prices are subject to change without notice. The Zoo is located at Meadowvale Road and Hwy. 401, Exit 389 east and west bound. For general information, call (416) 392-5929. The Toronto Zoo is open year round (except December 25th).

torontozoo.com