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Photo Credit: Toronto Zoo

## SplitElement Inc. Takes Toronto Zoo's *Apps For Apes Program* To The Next Level

**Friday, November 15, 2013, Toronto, Ontario:** The Toronto Zoo and innovation company SplitElement Inc. have joined forces to advance the Toronto Zoo's *Apps for Apes Program* to the next level. Sumatran orangutans are highly intellectual and have learned to use tools, such as sticks for a variety of purposes, and in 2012 iPads were added to the list. *The Apps for Apes Program* was created by Richard Zimmerman of Orangutan Outreach, an Orangutan Conservation group based in New York. The Toronto Zoo received an iPad in April of 2012, from an undisclosed donor, and has been using the iPad with the six Sumatran orangutans as part of their daily enrichment program. The iPad offers a different form of mental stimulation for the Sumatran orangutans as they watch videos, view pictures and engage in memory games.

After the Toronto Zoo launched the *Apps for Apes Program* to the public SplitElement Inc. approached the Toronto Zoo with an opportunity to create a custom application for the iPad. This resulted in **Orangutapp** – the first mobile application designed specifically for Sumatran orangutans. The application allows Sumatran orangutans to communicate directly with Toronto Zoo Keepers by choosing options that will enrich their lives. For example, **Orangutapp** is being used to specify which, of a selection of daily enrichment items, the Sumatran orangutans would like – whether they choose grapes, kale or kiwi that day. The application is highly customizable and allows the Toronto Zoo to engage in playful and meaningful research into the likes and dislikes of the Sumatran orangutans. The **Orangutapp** application is the first step in an ongoing exploration of interspecies communication. In the upcoming months SplitElement Inc. will introduce another first, a large scale projected touch interface for the Sumatran orangutans. By removing barriers to communication between Sumatran orangutans and humans, the Toronto Zoo and SplitElement Inc. are working to create a more meaningful experience for zoo inhabitants and visitors. As we work at expanding the program we will, in time, be able to introduce an updated SplitElement Inc. app that will be available to the general public.

"The Toronto Zoo is excited to be working with SplitElement Inc. on enhancing the *Apps for Apes Program* with the Sumatran orangutans," says Matthew Berridge, Wildlife Care Keeper at the Toronto Zoo. "At the Toronto Zoo we provide our Sumatran orangutans with various forms of behavioural enrichment, and the iPads provide an added form of enrichment for the Sumatran orangutans. SplitElement Inc. has been wonderful to work with, and we look forward to a long relationship of creating new innovations together."

SplitElement Inc. is a Toronto based innovation company that focuses on creating meaningful user experiences across multiple platforms and channels. From online and mobile to interactive public space installations SplitElement Inc. finds unique ways to evoke emotion and engage customers in order to create lasting impressions.

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“We have a great opportunity to assist in positioning the Toronto Zoo as one of the most innovative Zoos globally,” says Demi Kandylis, Founder, Chief Innovation Officer, SplitElement Inc. “Technology advances at such a rapid pace and became much more affordable within the last few years that it is the perfect time to re-invent the Zoo experience and, in time, allow visitors to engage in meaningful ways with the animals as well as to create tools that allow for better and more effective research.”

The Toronto Zoo is the only Zoo in Canada with Sumatran orangutans. Sumatran orangutan's current status is critically endangered; the main threat of Sumatran orangutans today is loss of habitat. Forest habitat is being rapidly destroyed by conversion to agriculture, both by large commercial plantations and smaller subsistence farms, illegal logging, gold mining, and in particular palm oil plantations. The increased demand for palm oil is fueling destruction of the rainforest habitat of Sumatran and Bornean orangutans, pushing the already endangered species even closer to extinction. Estimates show that if something isn't done soon to stop the spread of palm oil plantations into the forests that harbor these Sumatran orangutans, they will be extinct in ten to fifteen years. Palm oil can be found in cookies, crackers, frozen dinners, shampoo, lotions, cosmetics, pet food, and many other products and is now the most widely produced edible oil. The Toronto Zoo encourages people to help orangutans in the wild by purchasing palm oil free products.

The Toronto Zoo is a leader in conservation efforts, with the increased attention caused by the iPads from Zoo visitors, general public and media it is a great opportunity to raise awareness of the essential need to protect Sumatran orangutans in the wild and to promote conservation efforts already in place. The Toronto Zoo has six Sumatran orangutans: Puppe (female) and her son Budi (male), Sekali (female) and son Kembali (male) and Ramai (female) and daughter Jingga (female). The troop can be seen on exhibit in the Indo-Malaya Pavilion and the Sumatran orangutans are part of the Species Survival Plan.

**About Toronto Zoo:**

The Toronto Zoo is Canada's premier zoo and a leader in animal preservation and environmental protection. More than a tourist attraction, the Toronto Zoo boasts a number of leading programs for helping wildlife and their natural habitats – from species reintroduction to reproductive research. A world-class educational centre for people of all ages, the Toronto Zoo is open every day except December 25 and attracts approximately 1.3 million visitors each year.



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