

**Press Release
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TORONTO ZOO'S AQUA-LINKS PROGRAM RELEASE ATLANTIC SALMON FRY INTO THE WILD

Tuesday, June 18, 2013, Toronto Ontario: With great pride and excitement, grade seven students from Emily Carr Public School released over 50 Atlantic salmon into the wild at the Greenwood Conservation Area in Ajax today. Releasing the Atlantic salmon into the wild was an important moment that the students have been working towards as they have been raising the salmon, in their classroom, since January 2013. The Toronto Zoo's Aqua-Links Program is an exciting conservation effort which links students in Ontario with students in Uganda to discuss water conservation. Focusing on these two Great Lakes regions of the world, the program fosters stewardship and appreciation for water as a precious resource, as well as for the fish that call these lakes home.

Each class is equipped with a salmon hatchery unit, complete with a chiller to keep the water at a bone chilling four degrees. As a class they raise and monitor endangered Atlantic salmon at school and they develop a personal connection to the fish and are invested in the entire process. A small proportion of the eggs are also being raised at the Toronto Zoo. Since 2009 the Aqua-Links Program has released over 4,000 Atlantic salmon fry. This year in particular has been extremely successful with 16 schools in five different school boards releasing over 2,000 Atlantic salmon fry into tributaries of Lake Ontario since May 2013 making it the largest release yet.

"The support and dedication of the 16 schools raising and monitoring the endangered Atlantic salmon is imperative in keeping the Toronto Zoo Aqua-Links Program moving forward" says C. Lee, Curator of Fishes "The Toronto Zoo congratulates the students from Emily Carr Public School for their contribution and today's historic and successful re-introduction into the wild."

Highlighted for their ecological and nutritional significance, Atlantic salmon in North America and haplochromine cichlids in East Africa are studied closely by students participating in the program. As part of Toronto's Aqua-Links Program and in partnership with the Lake Ontario Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program students in the GTA and beyond gain hands-on experience raising Atlantic salmon in their class through the winter, followed by a field-trip to release the fry in the spring. Additionally, the program is supported by multiple in-class visits by the Aqua-Links Coordinator. At the same time, students in Uganda receive lessons by program partners from NaFIRRI (National Fisheries Resources Research Institute) and link to North American students via the internet.

The program provides students with the tools, information and resources required to learn that local aquatic issues are also global concerns, and that solutions to these common problems are possible and by participating in this program they are directly making a difference.

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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.