



Youth gains field work experience, outreach skills in conservation job

B RANDON SZETO HAD JUST EARNED HIS his degree in conservation biology from the University of Alberta.

While he was on the search for his first job out of school, he knew he wanted a position that focused on conservation, environmental sciences, and outreach. That's why when Szeto learned that the Valley Zoo Development Society was hiring a conservation project assistant during the fall of 2023, he wanted to apply.



VALLEY ZOO DEVELOPMENT
SOCIETY, ALBERTA

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Brandon holding one of the several posters he helped create for the Wild Migratory Bird Day event at the Edmonton Valley Zoo.

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Brandon Szeto, Conservation Project Assistant

“Environmental sciences have been something I’ve been really interested in for a long time, and I knew this opportunity would help me a lot in my career goals,” he says.

Szeto was eventually hired and was able to gain this valuable work experience, thanks to funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association’s Youth Employment Experience (YEE) program. This program, funded by the Government of Canada, is designed to build skills and remove barriers to employment for youth. The program further builds capacity in the parks and recreation sector by providing mentorship support to each youth throughout their engagement in the program.

The Valley Zoo Development Society raises funds and promotes awareness to ensure the continued development of the Edmonton Valley Zoo and its education and conservation programs. It runs events and various programs throughout the year to achieve these goals.

In his role as Conservation Project Assistant, Szeto was responsible for helping the organization and the Edmonton Valley Zoo communicate broadly with the community about the importance of wildlife conservation.

Szeto says he learned how to communicate better through this role, especially when he worked on social media outreach.

“One of the things that was unexpected for me was the human side of outreach,” Szeto says. “I thought it would be a lot more environmental and animal-focused, but I learned a lot about outreach with people in general and how to communicate more effectively with people.”

In addition to social media outreach, Szeto also gained experience with event planning. In the fall of 2023, the

organization was able to host its first-ever Fall Migratory Bird Day at the Edmonton Valley Zoo.

His mentor, Catherine Shier, says Szeto played a role in helping make this successful event possible.

“Brandon was a big supporter of that event, and he helped us on site that day,” explains Shier, who is a biologist at the Edmonton Valley Zoo.

She adds that the family-friendly event helped raise awareness about keeping wild birds healthy on their migratory journey down south as they escape our northern winter. The organization was thrilled to have the opportunity to host an event in the fall and support new partnerships with community based conservation groups.

“The ability to have Brandon’s job extend past the summer, and into the fall, helped us create activities and reach new people that we otherwise wouldn’t be able to do,” Shier says.

She says that Szeto was also able to gain field work experience. He helped collect pictures from wildlife cameras to help the organization monitor wildlife in Edmonton’s river valley, and in addition, he designed a bird strike methodology which will help volunteers conduct bird strike mitigation in the coming spring when our migratory birds return in the spring.

While he’s not sure what his future has in store yet, Szeto says the work experience gave him many different skills he can use in his next conservation role.

“It’s definitely helped me in a lot of ways – and especially gave me experience in the communicative side of conservation,” he says. 🍁