

Stingray Bay: Protocols and Messaging

Mission in Action

When guests visit the Stingray Bay, they will:

Feel:	Safe while visiting our parks
	A sense of belonging - developing a sense of community
	An emotional connection and empathy for wildlife
Learn:	The stories of individual animals in our care (e.g., name, age, personality, etc.)
	Excellent animal wellbeing is a top priority
Act:	Connect with, and appreciate nature – be a respectful wildlife observer

We will meet these outcomes by:

- Welcoming guests to the Stingray Bay (**Belonging**) and setting up expectations using positive language, so guests know what to expect during their visit and what is expected of them (**Safe and Respectful Wildlife Viewing**).
- Keeping watch throughout the habitat to ensure guests are behaving appropriately and the stingrays are behaving normally (**Safety and Respectful Wildlife Viewing**).
- Learning about the guests through observation and asking them questions. Sharing stories of our animals that are likely to be relevant or of interest to them (**Belonging and Empathy**).
- Thank the guests for visiting and for respecting the stingrays and their habitat (**Belonging and Respectful Wildlife Viewing**).

Meeting these outcomes supports our mission: **Empowering People. Saving Wildlife.**

Hours of Operation

Stingray Bay is open year-round, during normal Zoo operating hours. Intended hours of operation are subject to change.

Feeding is available starting in the spring through the end of Wildlights. Food is portioned out per hour and sold in the Salty Seal Gift Shop. If all the portions for the hour have been sold, no food will be sold until the next hour.

Procedures, Policies and Protocols

General Protocols:

- Permitted items: strollers, wheelchairs, and other mobility devices
- Items **not** permitted for animal wellbeing: open food or drinks; open umbrellas
- Guests must rinse their hands up to their elbows as they enter the building before they put their hands/arms in the water.
- On busy days, strollers are encouraged to be parked outside, but they are always permitted inside.
- Respectful wildlife viewing should be demonstrated by touching the stingrays using one or two fingers only and touching gently on the stingrays' back or wing.
- Guests should always keep both feet on the ground outside of the stingray pool and not lean in too far

to touch.

- Only stingrays, fish, and hands in the water. Cameras, Go Pros, phones, etc. are not allowed in the stingray pool.
- Guests may rinse their hands at the sink when they are finished. Team members should also let guests know that the closest restroom is just outside the building if they'd like to wash with soap and water.

Protocols for Education Volunteers and Staff:

- At least two team members (at least one of whom must be an adult) are required inside Stingray Bay. Ideally, there will be three or four. Adult Volunteers, Docents, Interpreters and ZooAides can all handle the same roles and responsibilities while in Stingray Bay; however, ZooAides should not handle the radio.
- A designated radio and resource bag for Stingray Bay should be picked up each morning in the Education Building lobby and should be returned each evening. If assistance is needed, Animal Care Staff from Shores can be reached on Channel 2. Otherwise, the radio must remain on Channel 8 at a volume level that the team can listen for Education communications.
- If anything is dropped into the pool Education Team Members with clean hands can reach into the pool to reach in to retrieve the item. There are nets on the far wall near the exit that can be used for out of reach items.
 - If the item cannot be retrieved with the net, contact the Shores Department on Channel 2. Let them know what is in the pool and that assistance is needed to retrieve the item. They will either give further instructions or they will come to assist.
- Opening Stingray Bay
 - Check the Stingray Bay bag to ensure it contains clean towels and squeegee covers.
 - Stingray Bay should be unlocked when you arrive, but if it is not, radio Shores and let them know you are there and ready for the day.
 - Set up the entrance queuing line.
 - ♣ Busy day queuing: Using five or six green plastic stanchions, extend the stanchions parallel to the Stingray Bay windows. This line allows for ample stroller parking and a more scenic view as guests wait. Place the decoy strollers out, along the outside of the line/stanchions. The decoy strollers can be found just inside the exit door.
 - ♣ Non-busy day queuing: If the stanchions are already in place, move the first stanchions to create open access to the front door. Place the decoy strollers out, along the outside of the line/stanchions. The decoy strollers can be found just inside the exit door.
- Closing Stingray Bay
 - Bring decoy strollers into the building.
 - Turn off the automatic doors at the entrance to the building and at the exit, as you leave.
 - Return Stingray Bay radio, clicker, and bag to the Education Building.
 - ♣ Please place any dirty/used towels and/or squeegee covers from the "Dirty" zipper pouch into the dirty towel bin in the Education building lobby.

Feeding Protocols:

- Fish can be purchased inside the Salty Seal retail shop. Retail staff will instruct guests on the proper way to hold the fish to feed the stingrays safely.
- Education staff and volunteers may need to repeat or demonstrate proper feeding techniques to guests at the pool's edge.
- There are black Kong feeders hanging on the mesh near the retail counter. These can be used for guests who do not want to use their hands to feed the stingrays or for guests who need aid in reaching

into the pool to feed.

Stingray Containment Protocol:

- If an animal gets out of the pool, call Shores immediately on Channel 2 and let them know there is an animal out of the stingray pool. Give the Shores team any details about the animal that you can.
- Keep guests away from the animal.
- Follow the instructions given by the Shores Animal Care staff member.

Emergency Weather Response:

If potentially dangerous weather conditions are imminent, a Level 2 weather emergency will be announced on all radio channels as a Security Alert. This may include a direction that Rides are temporarily closed. Stingray Bay does not close during a Level 2 Security Alert.

ZooAides:

- For thunder and lightning: stay inside Stingray Bay or return to the Education Building
- For tornadoes or severe weather: immediately seek shelter in the Adventure Cove bathrooms
- Once in a safe space: call or text 614-724-3420 to let the ZooAide Supervisor know your location.

Adults (volunteers or interpreters):

- Stay inside Stingray Bay for thunder and lightning, or the Adventure Cove bathrooms for tornadoes or severe weather.
- Once in a safe space: call or text 614-724-3483 (or radio on channel 8) to alert the Daily Contact of your location and the team members who are with you.

Emergency Response: Refer to Safety and Security Training

Service Animal Policy:

- Service animals are permitted anywhere that guests have access to in Stingray Bay.
- If you notice a concerning response from the stingrays, contact the Shores Animal Care staff.

Volunteer and Staff Roles

Education Team Members:

- **All Team Members:**
 - Engage and educate the guests by introducing the animals and providing interpretive messaging. Let the moment guide the message and gauge the interest of the guest.
 - Demonstrate to and encourage guests on how to be a respectful wildlife observer by walking, using a quiet voice, and interacting with the stingrays appropriately.
 - Encourage guests to be respectful of the habitat by storing food and drink away from the pool, and disposing of trash and recyclables appropriately.
- **Greeter:**
 - Stationed between the entrance door and the hand rinse station, closer to the hand rinse station.
 - Let visitors know how to rinse their hands/arms and the appropriate way to touch the stingrays.

- Utilize the clicker to count the number of guests. Scan the QR code at the end of each hour to record the number.
- When not actively greeting guests, the greeter can move about the area too, to interact with visitors and answer questions.
- **Host:**
 - If it is an especially busy day in SRB, a team member can be stationed at the end of the railing, just past the hand rinse station.
 - Encourage guests to open spots along the pool. If there are no openings around the pool, the host can hold guests until space is available.
- **Floater:**
 - The floater should be aware of any slipping hazards and squeegee around the pool as needed.
 - Show guests the hand rinse station near the exit and also let them know there is a bathroom with soap and paper towels just outside of the building.

Animal Care Team Members:

- Unlock the building at opening
- Stock fish and sorting cups at the beginning of each day
- Respond in the event of an emergency
- Perform husbandry tasks throughout the day, monitor health and wellbeing of all stingrays, ensure all stingrays are fed including stingrays in the separate pen, and all other animal care related responsibilities.

Retail Team:

- Sell fish in accordance with the allotted amount each hour, based on the amount of food for the day.
- Direct guests on the proper way to hold the fish to allow safe feeding of stingrays.

Team Member Training

Education Team Members: An online training session is required yearly, and new volunteers complete 3 trainee shifts in the area. The operations protocol is discussed in detail during training.

Animal Care Team Members: The Shores Department has dedicated personnel for Stingray Bay; however, all keepers receive training regarding Stingray Bay. Any Shores keeper can utilize their department's Keeper Training check-off sheets to ensure they have full knowledge of Stingray Bay and the animals that are in this area.

Retail Team Members: A retail team member will be in the Salty Seal Gift Shop to sell fish for feeding during specific times of the year. If the Salty Seal Gift Shop is not open, fish will not be sold for feeding.

Animal Wellbeing: Choice and Control

Animals in the Stingray Bay are allowed to occupy any area in their pool. A portion of this habitat is reachable by guests along the edge of the pool. Stingrays have the choice to interact with guests, and fish is sold for guests to hold to encourage positive interactions with the stingrays. Guests are given instructions on interacting with the stingrays upon entering the building and when purchasing fish.

Any time Stingray Bay is open for guests, the stingrays are monitored closely.

Guest Engagement Examples

Feeling Comfortable with Stingrays

Mission-based Outcome: Feel safe while visiting our parks.

- *Stingray Bay is a place where, sometimes, guests may feel nervous about touching a stingray. This is the perfect opportunity to help them understand more about stingrays at the Zoo and maybe address some of their apprehension.*
- Stingray Bay lets you safely interact with stingrays—even if you’re a bit nervous! Have you visited before? It’s a unique chance to meet these amazing animals up close. If you have any questions or worries, I’m here to help.
 - Worried about the barbs? In their native habitats, stingrays use their tail barbs to protect themselves from predators, like sharks, large fish, seals, and sea lions. At the Zoo, they don’t have predators, so our Animal Care team trims the barbs regularly—just like trimming your fingernails. It doesn’t hurt them.
 - Worried about being bitten? The mouths and teeth of stingrays look different than ours. They have hard plates inside their mouths that they use to crunch up the clams, crabs, or other animals with hard shells that they eat. Their mouths are on the underside of their bodies because they need to be able to suck up those prey animals from the mud or sand. Touching them along their backs is the furthest you can be from their mouths.
 - If you decide to feed the stingrays, we’ll show you how to hold food in a way that keeps the stingrays comfortable and you safe. There are also special tools that I can show you how to use to keep your hands completely out of the water while feeding.

Shark and Ray Conservation

Mission-based Outcome: CZFP is a conservation organization that is making a difference.

- Two-thirds of sharks, rays, and their cousins are at risk of extinction from overfishing. Most species of rays are not intentionally targeted by commercial fishing and are caught accidentally, which is called “bycatch”.
 - See their large bodies and wing-like fins? This body shape can make them more likely to get tangled in fishing nets. Rays also need water flowing over their gills to breathe, so if they get stuck, they might not survive. Also, many rays live in busy coastal areas where a lot of fishing happens, so the risk of being caught is higher.
 - You can help by choosing sustainable seafood when shopping or dining out! The Seafood Watch guide from Monterey Bay Aquarium is an easy way to help choose fish and other seafood options that minimize harm on the environment and other wildlife, like rays!
 - Link to learn more: <https://www.seafoodwatch.org/>
- The Zoo is part of the AZA’s SAFE (Saving Animals from Extinction) Shark and Ray program, a partnership of over 70 organizations. Together, we support shark and ray conservation through research and sharing science-based information. By working collaboratively, we can make a real impact for these species.
 - Link to learn more: <https://www.safesharks.org/>