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## Spring strike cost Toronto Zoo \$4M

The figures are in a report that goes to the zoo's board of management on Thursday.



Visitors to the Toronto Zoo remained below target through August — but above 2016 levels — and are expected to strongly rebound in September. (RENE JOHNSTON / TORONTO STAR) | [ORDER THIS PHOTO](#)

By **DAVID RIDER** City Hall Bureau Chief  
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The strike that closed [Toronto Zoo](#) for five weeks last spring cost the city-owned attraction \$4 million and 280,000 visitors.

The startling figures are in a routine report on attendance and revenue going to the zoo's board of management Thursday.

“There is no doubt the labour disruption had a significant impact on both revenues and attendance,” Jennifer Tracey, the zoo’s senior marketing director, said in an email to the Star on Wednesday. “The general attendance and school group numbers were particularly impacted.”

Zoo workers walked off the job May 11 saying they could not agree to weakened job security demanded by management in a contract proposal.

The breeding, research and display facility, with 5,000 animals including [two giant pandas](#) and their Toronto-born offspring, remained off-limits to the public until June 14 after workers [signed a new four-year contract](#).

The [report](#) states the zoo had expected 218,012 visitors during the period that it was closed. Even after the zoo re-opened, attendance was down 62,125 children because schools had cancelled planned visits for groups and camps.

The flow of visitors to the Scarborough attraction remained below target through August — but above 2016 levels — and appears to be strongly rebounding in September.

Although the zoo saved on unionized staff salaries that weren’t paid during the strike, it is warning city hall of a net forecast loss of \$3.99 million due to the shutdown.

Toronto taxpayers subsidized the zoo to the tune of about \$12 million last year. Attendance, buoyed by the pandas, hit 1.3 million but is expected to dip next year because the pandas leave for Calgary in the spring.

Councillor Paul Ainslie, chair of the zoo board, said he’s hopeful that the busy summer with full day camps and stronger-than-expected September attendance will shrink the financial hole left by the strike.

“I’m optimistically hoping our third quarter will help clear up some of that (shortfall),” he said. “My fingers are crossed.”

Christine McKenzie, president of CUPE Local 1600, said morale remains good among her members despite the bitter contract fight.

“It’s always awkward coming back to work after a labour dispute but we all care about the animals and I think most people understand we were fighting more with city hall,” than zoo management, she said.

The workers, who got 1.25-per-cent hikes in each of the four years of their contract and made significant job-security concessions, will be closely watching to see what kind of increases the city awards the zoo’s non-union staff, McKenzie said.

That recommendation also goes to the zoo board Thursday but has not yet been made public.

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