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**AT LEAST 6 PUPS BORN TO ENDANGERED RED WOLF AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM**

*Births are part of a successful breeding program to ensure survival of the red wolf; Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium pioneered the effort – begun in 1973 - to save the species from extinction*

TACOMA, Wash. – An endangered red wolf gave birth to at least six pups over an approximately 30-hour period Sunday night and Monday at Point Defiance Zoo &

Aquarium.

The prolonged birthing process surprised and delighted zoo staff members. Monday morning, there was a litter of two. But mama wasn't through. At least four more pups arrived over the course of the day and evening Monday.

The births represent another milestone in an effort established at Point Defiance Zoo in 1973 to save the extremely fragile species from extinction.

**Millie**

Millie, an 8-year-old female, whelped the pups in an out-of-view den area in the Red Wolf Woods exhibit beginning at about 10 p.m. Sunday. Their father is 9-year-old Graham.

The first two pups, born on Mother's Day, are males and appear to be healthy and actively nursing. The genders and health of their siblings, born Monday morning and afternoon, is not yet known. Zoo veterinary and zoological staff hope to check on them again Wednesday.

Millie is an attentive and protective mother, said Will Waddell, the zoo's Red Wolf program coordinator, who also manages the nationwide red wolf Species Survival Plan and is part of the Red Wolf Recovery Team.

The pups each weighed about 13 ounces at birth.

Although they are the first red wolves born on zoo grounds in 29 years, the program has produced hundreds of pups at off-site breeding facilities since its inception.

"We are proud that the animals have settled well into their new home and that we are able to contribute to red wolf breeding efforts here at the zoo," said General Curator Karen Goodrowe Beck, who also is reproductive adviser to the Special Survival Plan. "The births provide a remarkable opportunity for our visitors to connect with this species and for all of us to aid in their conservation."

Zoo staff are working on a closed-circuit camera feed of Millie and her pups in their den so they might be viewable by the media and the public.

They likely will come out of their den and into the exhibit in three to four weeks – a purely voluntary action – Waddell said.

The births in the 2-year-old Red Wolf Woods exhibit were the second in a week for the Point Defiance Zoo program. A female named Lupin bore nine pups May 7 at an off-site breeding facility near Eatonville. They include seven females and two males. All are doing well, Waddell said.

Point Defiance Zoo biologists, many of whom have worked for years to ensure survival of the red wolf species, are delighted with the births and point to nearly four decades of success in the breeding and recovery effort.

Not only are they proud surrogate “parents,” they point out the births will put a spotlight on a program that’s a true success story in animal population breeding and recovery.

The first litter of pups in the red wolf recovery program was born at the zoo in 1977; this year marks the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that event.

Those births were the watershed moment in the recovery of the species.

By the 1970s, a scant 14 were all that remained of the once populous species. In 1980, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service declared the red wolf biologically extinct in the wild.

Today, some 100 roam the Red Wolf Recovery Area operated by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in northeastern North Carolina. Roughly 40 pups have been born there this year, Waddell said. All are descendants of red wolves born through the breeding and recovery program. But the population, whose range once extended across the Southeastern United States, remains threatened by a number of environmental and human factors.

They were first reintroduced to the wild 25 years ago.

“The pups born over the last week help shine a spotlight on this program so crucial to the survival of the red wolf,” Waddell said. “The births will help us highlight the ongoing efforts to conserve red wolves and the challenges these animals continue to face in the wild.”

The breeding and recovery program is a cooperative effort among 41 U.S. zoos and wildlife centers and the Fish & Wildlife Service. It is part of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums Species Survival Plan.

There are approximately 196 adults and juveniles at the cooperating facilities, including 37 pups born in nine litters this spring.

“For nearly 40 years, PDZA has led dedicated SSP partners in the breeding of red wolves in zoos and wildlife centers,” said David Rabon, coordinator of the Red Wolf Recovery Program for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. “Their leadership and contribution, as well as that of all of the SSP facilities, has been crucial in preventing the extinction of the red wolf.”

The zoo’s leadership has been extensive and unwavering through the years.

Zoo veterinarian Dr. Holly Reed is veterinary adviser to the red wolf Species Survival Plan; Craig Standridge, Public Programs & Visitor Studies Coordinator at the zoo, is the education adviser.

Helping to preserve the imperiled species dovetails well with the zoo's core values of conservation and preservation, Deputy Director John Houck said.

"The Red Wolf Recovery Program is living proof that zoo-based endangered species breeding programs can successfully bring a species back from the brink of extinction," Houck said. "This is another wonderful example of how well such programs are working."

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*Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo and aquarium, promotes responsible stewardship of the world's resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).*