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Clouded leopard cubs leaving Tacoma for new home at Denver Zoo

TACOMA, Wash. -- Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium is saying goodbye to two of its four clouded leopard cubs tomorrow. Cubs Taji and Lisu are moving to their permanent home at the Denver Zoo.

Taji is one of two clouded leopard cubs born at the Tacoma zoo this past June. He was paired with Lisu, a female cub from Nashville Zoo for future breeding four months after his birth.

"We're excited to be able to send this pair to Denver," said the zoo's general curator Karen Goodrowe Beck. "More people will get the opportunity to see these beautiful cats, and the cubs will hopefully help grow the population of this endangered species."

Point Defiance Zoo is one of only three zoos in the country breeding the endangered clouded leopards, along with Nashville Zoo and the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo. The secretive cats live mostly in the forests of Southeast Asia, but clear cutting to make way for palm oil plantations has threatened their existence.

The birth of the zoo's two cubs brought the total number of clouded leopard cubs born in the United States this year to eight. Point Defiance Zoo staff hand-raised the cubs, who have been on display in the zoo's "cub den."

The cub den is part of the zoo's new clouded leopard exhibit, Cats of the Canopy, which opened in August. The exhibit also includes a high enclosure outfitted with trees and branches that allow the adult clouded leopards to show off their extraordinary climbing skills.

Though cubs Taji and Lisu will soon be gone, Taji's sister Sumalee remains on exhibit in the cub den with her match, Sabah. Sabah is a male cub from Smithsonian's National Zoo. That duo will leave Tacoma later this year for their new digs at Central Florida Zoo & Botanical Garden.

Two adult clouded leopard pairs also inhabit the Cats of the Canopy exhibit. A third pair of clouded leopards lives at the zoo behind the scenes. And zoo staff hope there will be more clouded leopard cubs come spring.

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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).