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FIVE “ROBUST” RED WOLF PUPS ARE NURSING WELL WITH PROTECTIVE MOM MILLIE

But there is sad news, too: Two pups have died and one is in treatment with a leg injury

Tacoma, Wash. - Five endangered red wolf pups continue to thrive at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, attended by their protective mother, Millie, and father, Graham.

A sixth is being treated in the zoo’s Animal Health Care facility for a leg injury.

They are the first red wolf pups born on zoo grounds in 29 years, though more than 300 have been whelped at an off-site breeding facility over the last three decades.

Millie’s eight pups were born over an approximate 30-hour period beginning on Mother’s Day, May 13. But two of them, the smallest of the litter, died late last week.

Staff biologists and veterinarians are giving Millie and Graham space to care for their pups with minimal interference, said General Curator Karen Goodrowe Beck.

All appear to be robust and thriving, she added.

“We’re delighted with the progress of these new additions to the critically endangered red wolf, “ Goodrowe Beck said. “They’re a success story in the ongoing efforts of Point Defiance Zoo and other participants in the Red Wolf Species Survival Plan.”

Zoo staff were saddened and disappointed by the deaths of the two pups, Goodrowe Beck said. However, such deaths are not uncommon in the animal kingdom.

The family is living in a den at the zoo’s 2-year-old Red Wolf Woods exhibit. It likely will be three to four weeks before the pups venture out on their own, 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.

Millie’s litter of eight was on the larger end of the range for red wolves. An average litter is four, though they can range from one to nine pups, Waddell said.

The first litter of pups in the Red Wolf Recovery Program was born at the zoo in 1977; this year marks the 35th 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 current 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.

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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).