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TWO FRAGILE CLOUDED LEOPARD CUBS DIE WITHIN 48 HOURS OF BIRTH AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO

TACOMA, Wash. – Two endangered clouded leopard cubs were born at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium over the weekend, but they were quite fragile and died within 48 hours of birth.

The cubs, a male and female, were born late Saturday afternoon. Both had very low birth weights, said Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium head veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf. The female was just 4.5 ounces, while the male weighed just over 7 ounces.

They died within hours of one another on Monday.

The cubs were born to 7-year-old Jao Ying, who came to Tacoma from the Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Thailand to augment genetics in the North American clouded leopard population. Four-year-old Chee Wit was the father. Both are part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan®.

Veterinarians and zookeepers with years of experience in clouded leopard conservation projects cared for the cubs around the clock since their birth. Their first-time mother was not producing milk and did not nurture them.

Necropsies did not reveal the causes of death, but both cubs were exceptionally small, Wolf said. Tissue samples have been sent to feline pathology experts for further testing and review.

“We have been trying to encourage this pair to breed for several years, so this is a difficult loss,” zoo general curator Karen Goodrowe Beck said. “Clouded leopards are highly endangered.”

Clouded leopards are native to Southeast Asia, and it's difficult to ascertain how many remain in the wild because they're very elusive. But conservation groups believe their numbers are drastically dwindling due to poaching and destruction of their native habitat.

In addition to its participation in the Species Survival Plan® Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium has long been active in clouded leopard research and conservation projects here and in Southeast Asia.

Five clouded leopard cubs have been born and raised at the zoo since 2011.

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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).