

Two clouded leopard cubs born at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

Tacoma zoo is one of only three zoos in the country breeding endangered clouded leopards

Tacoma, Wash. – Chai Li , a female clouded leopard at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, gave birth to a litter of two cubs Tuesday, June 14. Staff had been on a round-the-clock pregnancy watch of the 23-month-old clouded leopard for the past 24 hours.

This is Chai Li's (pronounced "chai-lye") first litter. She and the cubs' father, 23-month-old Nah Fun (pronounced "nah-foon"), were born at the Khao Kheow Open Zoo in Thailand and put together as a future breeding pair when they were five days old.



*Two endangered clouded leopard cubs were born at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Wash., on June 14.
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"There is nothing cuter than clouded leopard cubs," said staff biologist Andy Goldfarb, who has worked with exotic cats for 25 years. "They appear healthy and are doing well."

Point Defiance Zoo is one of only three zoos in the country breeding endangered clouded leopards, along with the Smithsonian Institution's National Zoo & the Nashville Zoo. The birth of the cubs at Point Defiance Zoo brings the total number of cubs born this year in the United States to eight.

The cubs, which generally weigh about a half-pound at birth, will be hand-raised by zoo staff. In a couple of weeks, the cubs will move into the zoo's new cub den, where visitors can see them up close and watch staff feed and care for them. The June and John Mercer

Cub Den is a key feature in the zoo's new \$1 million Cats of the Canopy exhibit, which is scheduled to open later this summer.

"We built the cub den so our visitors could bond with these cubs when they were tiny," general curator Dr. Karen Goodrowe Beck said. The two cubs bring the total number of clouded leopards to eight at Point Defiance Zoo.

Clouded leopards live mostly in the forests of Southeast Asia, but massive clear-cutting to make way for the expansion of palm oil plantations has threatened their populations. Exactly how many clouded leopards exist is unknown because the cats are so difficult to study.

With clouded leopards vulnerable to extinction in the wild, zoo staff stress the significance of the cubs to the species as a whole.

"These cats are very rare in zoos and in the wild," Goodrowe Beck said. "We hope our visitors will fall in love with these cubs and be inspired to help save their wild counterparts."

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium participates in the Association of Zoos & Aquariums' Clouded Leopard Species Survival Plan (SSP®), which oversees the clouded leopard populations in zoos worldwide and makes breeding recommendations based on the genetics of each cat. Fewer than 65 clouded leopards live in 24 accredited North American zoos.

Zoo staff will invite the public to vote on the cubs' names once they are safely settled and staff are able to determine their genders.

The zoo has two other pairs of clouded leopards, Josie and Raja who produced two cubs at Point Defiance Zoo in 2003 and Jao Ying and Chee Wit, who zoo staff hope will breed next spring in the new exhibit.

The zoo's Cats of the Canopy exhibit is being funded by the Zoo Society's Vision for the Future capital campaign. The Zoo Society, which has raised 92 percent of its goal, recently launched the final phase of the campaign to provide opportunities for individuals in the community to participate.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest's only combined zoo & 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).