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IT'S TIME TO SAY GOODBYE: CLOUDED LEOPARD CUBS HEADED TO OTHER ZOOS

Pair set to leave Sept. 6; Male Chận sũng headed to Kansas, while sister Suksn goes to Houston

TACOMA, Wash. – Visitors to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium have just one more week – including the long Labor Day Weekend – to bid adieu to the two clouded leopard cubs that have captivated Tacoma for months.



The zoo is open 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily through Labor Day, and 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sept. 4 and 5.

The cubs are set to fly out Sept. 6 for separate zoos – and new lives – as they meet their future mates.

Chận sung (pronounced Chan-Soon) is headed to Tanganyika Wildlife Park near Wichita, Kan., where he will be paired with Sassy, a 4 ½-month-old.

Suksn (Sook-Son) will go to Houston Zoo, where she will meet future mate Tarek, who was born at Nashville Zoo in March. He's just six days older than Chận sung and Suksn, who were born at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium March 6 to Chai Li (Chai-lye) and her mate Nah Fun (Nah-foon).

The Tacoma cubs are being moved as part of a carefully orchestrated and wide-ranging breeding program designed to maintain diversity in the gene pool, said Andy Goldfarb, a staff biologist who's worked with exotic cats for more than 25 years.

The privately operated Tanganyika Wildlife Park has a long history of breeding and raising cats large and small, director Jim Fouts said.



Seven clouded leopard cubs were born through the Species Survival Plan® at Association of Zoos & Aquariums member zoos this year: one at National Zoo –Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.; four at Nashville Zoo; and two at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

Clouded leopards typically breed at around 2 years old.

The endangered cats live mostly in the forests of Southeast Asia, but massive clear-cutting for oil palm plantations threatens their populations. They are shy and secretive, and it's not known how many live in the wild.

Point Defiance Zoo 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.

Point Defiance Zoo has three pairs of adult clouded leopards. In addition to the cubs' parents, Jao Ying (Jow-ying) and Chee Wit live in the Cats of the Canopy exhibit. Josie and Raja, who produced two cubs at Point Defiance Zoo in 2003, live behind the scenes at the zoo's Wild Wonders Outdoor Theater.

Zoo staff hope that Jao Ying and Chee Wit will produce cubs.

Goldfarb said he's sad to say goodbye to Chận sūng and Suksn, who've been hand-raised since birth.

They've been favorites of zoo staff and visitors, who've watched with delight as the cubs went from bottle feeding to cavorting in their nursery and then roaming in an outdoor exercise yard.

"It's not easy," to part with the cubs, Goldfarb said. "But the need to increase the clouded leopard population is great, and it's exciting to know that the cubs raised here are meant to be a big part of the species' future. It's crucial for people to see and learn about these cats in zoos and take home messages about ways they can work to conserve them in the wild."

Photo captions: A clouded leopard cub fit easily in a staff biologist's hands just a few months ago.

Chận sung now weighs about 25 pounds, while his sister, Suksn, weighs in at 19. They're pictured in the outdoor exercise yard.

Photo credit: Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium

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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).