



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 7, 2016

ENDANGERED CLOUDED LEOPARD CUBS GROWING FAST AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

Triples weigh under 1 pound each, and they spend their days eating, crawling a bit and sleeping

TACOMA, Wash. – They squeak. They crawl a bit, sometimes over each other. They huddle together closely, looking like a big ball of spotted fur with legs and tails sticking out. They eagerly eat their special formula. And they sleep. *A lot.*

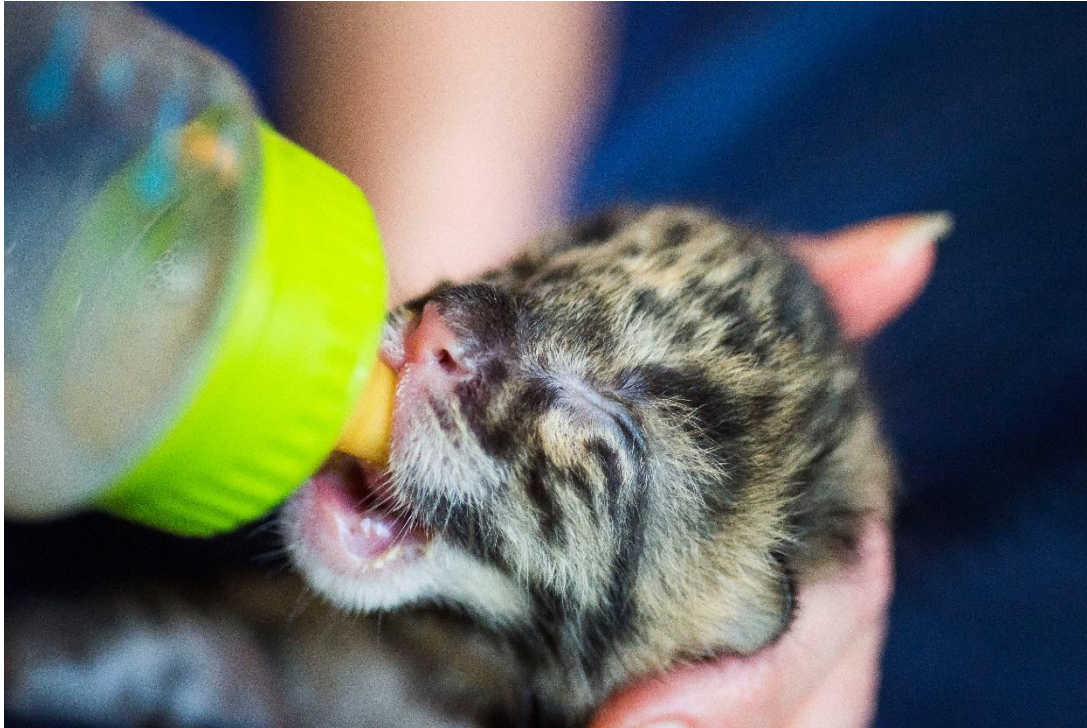


The eight-day-old clouded leopard triplets at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium are under the 24-hour care of keepers, who feed them seven times a day and see to all of their other needs.

Hand-rearing of these endangered exotic cats is an established practice that's critical for their well-being as cubs and their later participation in the Species Survival Plan® program for clouded leopards, said staff biologist Andy Goldfarb.

He has spent three decades caring for and raising endangered cats, and is known internationally as an expert in raising clouded leopards.

The cubs each weigh around 13 ounces, or just about three-quarters of a pound. It's still too early to tell their genders for certain, and they have yet to be named. The zoo will issue a news release and post to its Facebook page when details are available on how the public can help name the cubs.



No date has been determined for their public debut, but zoological staff members expect the triplets' feeds will be viewable in the Cats of the Canopy exhibit Cub Den by the end of this month.

"These cubs are particularly valuable to the Species Survival Plan® managed breeding program because the genetics of their mother, Sang Dao, are not represented in the population," Goldfarb said. That increases genetic diversity among the clouded leopards in North America, he added.

Sang Dao came to Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium three years ago from Tanganyika Wildlife Park in Kansas.

The cubs' father, Tien, was born at Point Defiance Zoo three years ago. They are first-time parents.





The species is under significant pressure in the wild from encroachment and destruction of its habitat, as well as poaching.

The cats, which live in the forests and trees of Southeast Asia, are elusive, and it's difficult to know how many remain in the wild.

"These cats are very rare," Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium General

Curator Karen Goodrowe Beck said. "We hope visitors to the zoo will connect with them and be inspired to take action to help save their species in the wild."

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium long has been a leader in clouded leopard conservation. Both Goodrowe Beck and Goldfarb, supported by The Zoo Society's Dr. Holly Reed Wildlife Conservation Fund, have worked with zookeepers in Thailand on improving ways to breed and rear clouded leopards. Goodrowe Beck holds a Ph.D. in reproductive biology.

Having a robust population of clouded leopards in zoos allows scientists to study the species' behavior, physiology and medical conditions. That's not possible in the wild, Goodrowe Beck said. But the information gained may one day help scientists develop conservation strategies for helping the species in the wild.

Maintaining clouded leopard populations in zoos allows animals like Sang Dao and Tien – and their cubs – to inspire people to take action on behalf of wildlife and wild places.

The zoo's Paws for the Cause program, meanwhile, helps consumers understand the link between some foods they eat and products they use and the deforestation of animal habitat half a world away. The program also provides shoppers with tips on choosing products with deforestation-free palm oil and ways to get engaged by urging companies to make wildlife friendly choices in the raw materials they buy. Palm oil, used in a wide variety of goods from candy to shampoo and body lotion to laundry soap, is derived from the oil palm tree. And some palm oil production results in wholesale destruction of the habitat on which clouded leopards, orangutans, tigers, tapirs and other animals depend.

To learn more about this and how to take action, go to www.pdza.org/pawsforthecause. To learn more about clouded leopards, go to www.pdza.org/clouded-leopard and www.cloudedleopard.org.

Tacoma zookeepers founded the nonprofit Clouded Leopard Project 15 years ago (www.cloudedleopard.org). The group works closely with the zoo and The Zoo Society in fundraising efforts for conservation projects.

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

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