



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MEXICAN GRAY WOLF PUPS BORN AT THE PHOENIX ZOO
AS PART OF CONSERVATION PLAN**

This is the first successful lobo birth at the Phoenix Zoo in twenty years.

PHOENIX (June 3, 2019) - The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation (ACNC)/Phoenix Zoo is excited to announce the arrival of a litter of Mexican gray wolf pups. ACNC/Phoenix Zoo staff had noted female Mexican wolf Tazanna denning and shortly thereafter were able to confirm the birth of six pups in early May.

Parents are raising the pups without interference from staff, so until a first neonate exam is done by Zoo veterinary staff at an appropriate age, the family will not be disturbed.

"The parents are doing a great job caring for their pups," Angela Comedy, ACNC/Phoenix Zoo Carnivore Collection Manager said. "It is a delicate process and they have certainly risen to the occasion."

This birth is part of a cooperative breeding program between the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Mexican Gray Wolf Species Survival Plan™ and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wolf Recovery Plan, which aims to restore Mexican gray wolves to their native southwest territory, including Arizona. The Phoenix Zoo has been active in the Mexican Gray Wolf SSP and USFWS Mexican Wolf Recovery Plan for quite a few years, although several of the wolves at the Zoo in the past have been single-sex groups or geriatric animals. With the arrival of a young pair of wolves in 2017, the Zoo looked forward to the possibility of Mexican gray wolf breeding and offspring for the first time in several years.

Parents Tulio and Tazanna are 3 years old. The male, Tulio, was born in May 2016 at the Endangered Wolf Center in Eureka, Missouri. Tazanna was also born in May 2016, but at the California Wolf Center in Julian, California. The pair arrived at the Zoo on the same day in November 2017.

The duo was a recommended pairing by the Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan™ for breeding. Both wolves were instantly compatible when introduced to each other in 2017. Breeding season usually starts from the last week of January through mid-April and gestation takes 60 – 63 days with an average litter size of 4 – 5 pups.

“Fortifying the Mexican gray wolf population has been a reachable goal for some time now,” says Bert Castro, President and CEO of the ACNC/Phoenix Zoo. “It’s a rarity to spot one of these elusive “lobos” in the wild. Their population is endangered while conservationists have fathomed a possible, looming extinction. To this end, we are proud to invest in this conservation effort.”

131 wild individuals were reported in 2018, which is a 12 percent increase in the population over the previous year, yet still garnering an endangered classification. Their original home range spanned Central Mexico to southeastern Arizona, southern New Mexico and western Texas. Now they have been reduced to small restricted areas in New Mexico and Arizona. The reason for the dramatically low number of wolves is due to extirpation in the mid-1900s. Targeted because of intense predator control by the federal government, the howl of the Mexican gray wolf is now silenced throughout most of the wild ranges where they once thrived.

With just over 300 individual Mexican gray wolves distributed among 53 institutions in the United States and Mexico, there is still hope for wild repopulation with the influx of modern conservation collaborations. In 1976, the Mexican gray wolf was listed under the Endangered Species Act and the need for advocacy came to light. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mexico and partner agencies subsequently created a binational breeding program to reestablish wild populations. These efforts are still going strong today.

The goal of the managed breeding program is to make the most genetically diverse matches to support the continued health of Mexican wolf populations in human care and the wild. Zoo populations like the wolves at the Phoenix Zoo help support the ongoing genetic health of wild wolves.

The pups and their mother spend time in their den, but as they grow older and larger, they may be spotted with more regularity throughout the habitat.

MEDIA MATERIAL: Photos are available via this Dropbox link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/w7kfcyf8umkmc6/AAC3Lqnl0DT6Yzcj0eXbvFmfa?dl=0>

About the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation

The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation operates the Phoenix Zoo and the South Mountain Environmental Education Center. The ACNC advances the stewardship and conservation of animals and their habitats while providing experiences that inspire people and motivate them to care for the natural world.

The Phoenix Zoo is the only zoo in the Valley accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is a non-profit zoological park, serving 1.4 million guests annually. The Zoo is home to more than 3,000 animals, many of which are endangered and threatened species. For information on upcoming events, exhibits and activities at the Phoenix Zoo, visit www.phoenixzoo.org.

The South Mountain Environmental Education Center re-opened through an Operating Agreement between the Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department and the ACNC.

The facility is a hub for guests exploring the park/preserve as well as a gathering place for the community to learn about plants, animals, natural history and the conservation needs of the Sonoran Desert. It also is a popular destination for school field trips and family outings. Learn more at www.smeec.org.