



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**RECORD-BREAKING BREEDING SEASON BRINGS SEVEN LITTERS OF
ENDANGERED BLACK-FOOTED FERRETS TO THE PHOENIX ZOO**

*Most successful season since 1999 underscores the Zoo's commitment to
species recovery.*

PHOENIX (September 14, 2026) - The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation (ACNC)/Phoenix Zoo is excited to announce the arrival of 34 endangered black-footed ferret kits at the Zoo's Arthur L. and Elaine V. Johnson Conservation Center. This is the most successful breeding year since 1999 at the Phoenix Zoo. The kits make up seven litters from moms Chelly, Pico, Star Child, Honeydew, Laomo, Wickner and Madison.

"Reaching our most successful breeding season in more than 25 years is an incredible accomplishment for our organization," says Bert Castro, President and CEO of the Phoenix Zoo. "This milestone reflects the dedication of our animal care and conservation teams, and we're excited to watch these kits grow and eventually contribute to the recovery of their species."

The Phoenix Zoo is one of five facilities worldwide breeding black-footed ferrets for release to the wild as part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE) program for black-footed ferrets. Black-footed ferrets are considered one of North America's most endangered species. Once thought to be extinct, they have returned to their native habitat through reintroduction efforts. The Zoo has produced over 700 black-footed ferrets in its 34 years of involvement with the breeding program, with many released into prairie grasslands in Arizona and other parts of their native range. In 2025, 13 ferrets born at the Phoenix Zoo were reintroduced at sites in the wild.

The kits were raised inside their specially designed den boxes by their mothers. "The ferret mothers did a fantastic job of caring for the kits," noted the Zoo's Curator of Conservation & Science Whitney Heuring. "The kits stayed with their mothers for three months before most of them were transferred to a US Fish and Wildlife Service facility where they will learn how to hunt live prey before being released to the wild. Additionally, some kits will stay in the breeding program as part of the program's genetic management plan."

The Johnson Conservation Center is an off-exhibit space at the Zoo reserved specifically for breeding native species in collaboration with state and federal wildlife agency partners. In addition to black-footed ferrets, the Zoo also breeds narrow-headed gartersnakes and Chiricahua leopard frogs, among other species of conservation concern in Arizona.

MEDIA MATERIAL: Photos and video are available via this Dropbox link:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/k013kqyy70c272bhf7adg/AOtpdZlP9MTLj7QnB_Q1J8A?rlkey=dd82tbybtol2stmngx2y85a10&st=r7c4ic90&dl=0

Credit: Phoenix Zoo

About the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation

The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation operates the Phoenix Zoo. 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 phoenixzoo.org.