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## **Zoo is All Smiles with Significant Births and Hatchings of Slimy, Scaled and Swimming Additions**

August 19, 2016-- *Jacksonville, FL* – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) is enjoying a baby-boom in the herpetology department. In the past few weeks, the Zoo has celebrated the birth of five Atlantic stingray pups, and the hatching of six Louisiana pine snakes and two Gulf Coast waterdogs- a significant achievement for the Zoo community.

Stingray Bay is awash with excitement as the Zoo welcomed two litters of Atlantic stingray pups less than two months after the birth of a Cownose ray pup. This is the first time JZG has welcomed Atlantic stingray pups since the opening of Stingray Bay in 2011. The species is difficult to reproduce in captivity, so the significant births of five combined pups from our two mature females give the Zoo much pride in its successful breeding program. The newest additions bear a strong resemblance to little raviolis in size and shape and have such been affectionately named 'Ravioli', 'Macaroni', 'Tortellini', 'Rotini' and 'Linguini Eugenie,' after Eugenie Clark, the Shark Lady. The pups are currently being housed in a central pen in the exhibit pool until they are large enough to be introduced to the larger rays.

Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has participated in the Louisiana pine snake recovery program since 2011. Partnering zoos breed the critically endangered species in captivity, and then release hatchlings into the wild to help bolster native populations in Louisiana and eastern Texas. Last year, JZG marked its first successful hatching of four pine snakes, due in part to an investment in a "hibernaculum," a specialized refrigeration unit that allows keepers to manipulate temperatures during winter to stimulate breeding activity. This year, an astounding six snakes hatched, marking the Zoo's greatest hatching achievement with the species yet. These offspring will be held back and raised by other participating zoos to increase the captive breeding population for this recovery project.

The accomplishment which is most impressive is the successful hatching of the Gulf Coast waterdog, a native species of aquatic salamander sometimes referred to as the "mudpuppy." The Zoo currently has two larvae that are doing well, growing and developing quickly in the Amphibian Conservation Center.

This is a significant achievement for JZG, given that the Zoo has been working with this species for several years and has come very close to breeding them in the past, even receiving fertilized eggs last year, but had not been successful in hatching any offspring. To finally succeed with this project is a testament to the determination and perseverance of the keeper staff, gradually tweaking husbandry efforts through trial and error, ultimately achieving the milestone hatching. Even more significant, this may be the first time that this species has successfully been bred in captivity without the use of assisted reproductive technologies such as hormonal injection therapy.

Although the Gulf Coast waterdog is not presently threatened or endangered, the hope is that the husbandry and breeding techniques developed at JZG for this species can eventually be applied towards efforts to conserve and recover the Alabama waterdog, a closely-related, but endangered species.

These benchmark births and hatchings illustrate some of the important conservation work being done at the Zoo. From captive breeding and release programs, to the research being carried out on the reproduction of species in the Amphibian Conservation Center, JZG is emerging as an important contributor to the field of herpetological conservation.

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### **About Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens**

For over 100 years, the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has aimed to inspire the discovery and appreciation of wildlife through innovative experiences in a caring environment. Starting in 1914 with an animal collection of one red deer fawn, the Zoo now has more than 2,000 rare and exotic animals and 1,000 species of plants, boasting the largest botanical garden in Northeast Florida. **The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit organization and a portion of every ticket sold goes to the over 45 conservation initiatives Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens supports around the world, and here in NE Florida.** JZG is proud to be an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit [jacksonvillezoo.org](http://jacksonvillezoo.org)