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ZOO ANNOUNCES SUCCESSFUL HATCHING OF NORTH AMERICA'S RAREST SNAKE

August 17, 2018 - Jacksonville, FL – The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is celebrating the successful hatching of two Louisiana Pine Snakes – considered the rarest snake in North America. Found only in a few areas in Western Louisiana and bordering counties of Texas, this snake spends a lot of time in and around the burrows of pocket gophers – its main food source. This species is a non-venomous constrictor in the same family as bull snakes.

Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens participates in a cooperative Louisiana pine snake reintroduction program by partnering with other zoos to breed the critically endangered species and then release the hatchlings into the wild to bolster native populations. Louisiana Pine snakes lay the largest eggs of any North American snake but have an average clutch size of only 3-4. By comparison, rat snakes found in the same habitat can produce as many as 24 eggs. Because of its small clutch size, coupled with threats including habitat loss and vehicle mortality, this species is in decline in the wild. Joint efforts by zoos are an important component of the conservation of the species.

This is the fourth year Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has successfully hatched Louisiana pine snakes. In 2015, the Zoo invested in a hibernaculum, a specialized piece of equipment that keeps snakes at ideal temperatures and promotes breeding. The recent hatchings signify the 13th and 14th snakes JZG has contributed to the program.

A female hatched on August 1, weighing an impressive 115 grams. She was sent to the U.S. Forest Service to be released into the wild. A smaller male hatched on August 2 and will be held back to be released in April of next year. The process of holding the animal back to grow in controlled settings is called "headstarting." Studies are being conducted to determine if it is best to get hatchlings into the wild immediately or if they benefit by time to grow before being introduced to native populations.

"Based on available data, the Louisiana pine snake is North America's rarest snake species," said Cayle Pearson, Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Herpetology Supervisor. "We are proud to assist with its conservation and hope that one day the species will thrive once again in the wild."

Exciting news out of Louisiana came earlier in the month when colleagues at the Audubon Zoo in New Orleans reported that in a survey of snakes in the wild, they found a Louisiana pine snake that hatched at the Jacksonville Zoo and was released in back 2015!

[Link to video and photos](#)

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.