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Zoo is Celebrating the Hatching of Two Threatened Eastern Indigo Snakes

July 16, 2018 -- Jacksonville, FL – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is celebrating World Snake Day with the exciting hatching of two Eastern indigo snakes. Listed as threatened in its native range of the southeastern United States, population numbers are decreasing rapidly due to habitat loss. The hatchings on July 10 and 11 mark the first time the Zoo hatched this vulnerable species since 1997.

Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens recognized the importance of increasing the population of Eastern indigo snakes, and in 2012 received a pair with a breeding recommendation. The snakes recently reached sexual maturity and the female laid her first clutch. Eastern indigos, while nonvenomous, can be both territorial and voracious eaters, so the breeding pair were only together for a brief time.

According to the Zoo's Deputy Director for Animal Care & Conservation, Dan Maloney, "We are very proud and excited to welcome such significant new additions to the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens family. Six years ago, we acquired young snakes in hopes that they would be future parents. To finally have healthy hatchlings is extremely satisfying and lays the foundation for a successful, sustainable breeding program."

The two hatchlings emerged from their 4-inch eggs after a 100-day incubation. They are 13-inches long now but will quickly grow into the longest native snake species in the United States.

Eastern indigo snakes are a top predator and have a wildly varied diet consisting of everything from small mammals, birds, and amphibians, all the way up to one of their favorite prey items, Eastern diamond rattlesnakes. The decline of rattlesnake and gopher tortoise populations is contributing to the rapid decline in Eastern indigo snakes. Gopher tortoise burrows serve as an important shelter for the snakes in winter months.

These three threatened animals are linked by their habits and habitats and their decline helps highlight the importance of keystone species to entire ecosystems. The Zoo hopes that the new hatchlings can serve as ambassadors for local conservation efforts and reinforce our message of Living Well With Wildlife.

The mother of the two hatchlings can be viewed in the Wild Florida herpetology house. She shares her enclosure with a box turtle and a three-legged rescue Gopher tortoise.

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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.