



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: JJ Vitale ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 145 ▪ cell: 904-635-5035 ▪ vitalej@jacksonvillezoo.org
Lyndsay Plemmons ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 208 ▪ cell: 904-728-0618 ▪ plemmons1@jacksonvillezoo.org

ZOO ANNOUNCES SUCCESSFUL HATCHING OF ONE OF THE RAREST NATIVE SNAKES IN UNITED STATES

August 31, 2015 - Jacksonville, FL – On Wednesday, July 29, the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) hatched two Louisiana Pine Snakes – considered one of the rarest snakes in the United States. Found only in a few areas in Western Louisiana and bordering counties of Texas, this snake is truly fossorial, digging its own burrows in which to live. They spend 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 rat snakes.

This is the 3rd year JZG has participated in the captive breeding and release program. After the purchase of a cooling device similar to an incubator called a hibernaculum in early 2014, four eggs were laid, but all were infertile. This year, four eggs were again produced, two of which were fertile and hatched successfully. Once deemed healthy enough by zoo experts, these individuals will be taken to western Louisiana and released into their native habitat of longleaf pine forests, increasing numbers of the wild population. Combined with the individuals hatched at other conservation facilities, a total of 23 snakes will be released this year.

“This species has not seen much success breeding in captivity,” said Stefanie Jackson, Herpetology Keeper at JZG. “Any healthy hatchlings produced are extremely valuable to the future of the species. We are ecstatic to see all of our hard work pay off, and be able to contribute directly to the conservation of this critically imperiled species!”

The Louisiana Pine Snake lays the largest eggs of any North American snake with an average clutch size of 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 classified as critically endangered.

Photo Credits: Mark Beshel

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 an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit jacksonvillezoo.org.