

Edmonton Valley Zoo joins effort to protect endangered frogs

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The Edmonton Valley Zoo is leaping at the chance to be part of a program to save northern leopard frogs from extinction.



The Zoo has received 22 of the highly endangered frogs and plans to establish a permanent conservation breeding population here in Edmonton, whose offspring will be released in a targeted location in British Columbia with the goal of bringing the species back from the edge of extinction. In British Columbia, there is only a single remaining native population of northern leopard frogs located in the Creston Valley, but this population is vulnerable to extinction from habitat loss, disease, and invasive species.

The five-month-old frogs came from the Calgary Zoo and are now in quarantine behind-the-scenes at Edmonton Valley Zoo but next year will move into a new public enclosure. Once they begin breeding, the offspring will be relocated to the Columbia Marshes in southeast British Columbia where we hope to re-establish a wild population.

“Our zoo team has proven expertise in caring for several endangered frog species, so we felt we could make a substantial contribution to this important conservation project,” said Lindsey Galloway, Director of the Edmonton Valley Zoo. “Frogs play an important role in our ecosystems and we know that one third of the world’s amphibian species are at risk of extinction. By playing a role in this program, we know we can help this species recover in our neighborhood.”

In addition to the northern leopard frogs, the zoo is home to 13 other species of amphibians.

“We started to care for amphibians in 2008 to bring attention to the biggest extinction event since the dinosaurs,” said zookeeper Wayne Woods. “Since 2008 we have bred numerous species including the critically endangered golden mantella from Madagascar.”

Northern leopard frog populations in western Canada declined sharply in the 1970s and they are listed federally as an endangered species in British Columbia. This new Edmonton population will support the reintroduction breeding program, part of the British Columbia Northern Leopard Frog Recovery Team. That group is working to restore populations in British Columbia, where only one small population remains. In addition to the Edmonton Valley Zoo and the Calgary Zoo, the recovery team includes the Vancouver Aquarium, local biologists, indigenous groups, and representatives from the Government of British Columbia.

“Edmonton Valley Zoo is working hard to find new ways to help at-risk species,” Galloway said. “Our goal is to inspire our 400,000 annual visitors to become advocates for conservation. In addition, we are home to 14 endangered species -- such as Amur Tigers and Grevy's Zebra -- and so participate in Species Survival Plans that support genetic diversity. And now with this northern leopard frog program, we get to put animals back in the wild.”

Frogs around the world are important indicators of wetland health. Frog species are very adaptable so when populations decline it is a sure sign something is wrong in the ecosystem and other living things in the habitat may be in jeopardy. Northern leopard frogs are genetically distinct from other species found in Canada and are vulnerable to habitat loss and disease. Two additional populations have already been reintroduced to the wild as part of the program.

For more information:

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