



NEWS RELEASE

- For Immediate Release -

June 30, 2009

16 VANCOUVER ISLAND PUPS BORN AT THE CALGARY ZOO Canada's Most Endangered Mammal and a 2010 Olympic Mascot - Making a Comeback

Calgary, AB – When a species comes to the brink of extinction, it takes the dedicated and combined effort of many individuals and institutions to rescue it. In total, 65 Vancouver Island marmot pups were born this year at four partnering facilities across Canada including the Calgary Zoo, the Toronto Zoo, Mountain View Conservation & Breeding Centre in Langley, B.C. and the Tony Barrett Mt. Washington Recovery Centre on Vancouver Island.

“It is always an exciting and busy time in the spring when the litters start arriving,” said Rick Wenman, marmot keeper at the zoo’s Devonian Wildlife Conservation Centre. “We had a lot of new pairings of adults this year so we were very pleased to have such solid success with a total of 16 pups from six litters.”

The litters began arriving in late April and births continued through May. In spite of nest box cameras, obtaining an accurate pup count is challenging because the parents often hide the young in the straw bedding and the zookeepers do not want to disturb the marmots unnecessarily.

“It was really satisfying that a new pairing in particular, Harrison (4) and Mirabel (9), with valuable genetics which had not previously successfully mated had a litter of three pups,” continued Wenman. “She hid them really well for quite a while so I was surprised to find them in the nest box at about 3 weeks old.”

The Vancouver Island marmot is listed as endangered under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA) and the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) as well as a Priority 1 Species under the British Columbia Framework. Found only on Vancouver Island, their population remains too small

and fragmented to recover without intervention and assistance from captive breeding programs.

The VIM (Vancouver Island marmot) Recovery Strategy, implemented by the Marmot Recovery Foundation, supports the continued release of captive-born marmots to natural habitat on Vancouver Island as the only chance of increasing the VIM population within a reasonable period of time and preventing extinction.

The captive breeding program was founded on 55 wild marmots brought into captivity from 1997-2008 with the first two successful litters of three and five pups each was born at the Calgary Zoo in 2000 and another litter of two pups in 2001, leading to the first release of four marmots in 2003. A total of 155 captive-born marmots have now been released to the wild since 2003 and 59 more marmots will be released this summer.

From a population low of less than 30 wild Vancouver Island marmots in 2003, the population is expected to reach over 200 marmots in the wild by the end of this summer. In 2003, there were small pockets of marmots found on only three mountains on Vancouver Island, but they can now be found on 24 peaks. Last year, there was a record 33 pups born in the wild including a litter of second generation pups born to reintroduced marmots.

Careful animal management and pair selection has ensured healthy reproduction and the protection of over 96 per cent of the genetic diversity of the founding population.

The Marmot Recovery Program represents a new partnership approach for endangered species recovery supported by the breeding facilities, government, the forest industry and the public, working together to recover this uniquely Canadian marmot.

Media Information:

Interviews available upon request.

- 30 -

Contact: Laurie Herron
Manager, Communications
Phone: (403) 232-9388
Cell: (403) 899-7080
laurieh@calgaryzoo.ab.ca

OR Evan Turner
Corporate Services Assistant
Phone : (403) 232-9372
evant@calgaryzoo.ab.ca

See: www.calgaryzoo.com

The Calgary Zoo is part of a professional, accredited association and member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and the Canadian Association of Zoos and Aquariums (CAZA) comprised of caring, trusted experts committed to ensuring that many endangered and threatened species are part of the world's future. AZA and CAZA advocate on behalf of animals with a unified and consistent voice, and collaborate with others committed to their long-term survival. The Calgary Zoo participates in many Species Survival Plans (SSP), a network among accredited institutions designed to breed endangered species in captivity to ensure the best possible genetic diversity and maintain healthy populations in human care. Through our conservation, education and research programs, many animals in our care play an essential role in the survival of their species in the wild.

The Calgary Zoological Society is a charitable organization. Charitable Registration #118824192 RR0001