On September 2nd, the Texas State Aquarium released three barn owls back into their natural habitat. The owls were brought to the Aquarium’s Second Chances Wildlife Hospital on June 18th after the tree in which they were nesting was cut down. After closely monitoring the birds’ weights, as well as their hunting and flying capabilities, all three were ready to be returned back to the wild.

The Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) recently announced the recipients of thirty “Nature Play Begins at Your Zoo & Aquarium” grants. Supported through a special gift from the Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund, these competitive grants, selected through a rigorous review by a panel of industry experts, are being presented to AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums to encourage family nature play and conservation education.

“Accredited zoos and aquariums are one of the first places families experience nature together,” said Jim Maddy, President and CEO of the AZA. “These grants will help deepen the connection families have with nature, while also showcasing the important work zoos and aquariums are doing to save species in their backyard and in the wild and help build the next generation of conservationists.”

The Nature Play grants provide financial, logistical and creative support for zoos and aquariums seeking to increase or enhance family-centered nature experiences in their communities. Research has shown that free play immersed in an outdoor setting is fundamental to connecting children with the natural world around them. The value of these experiences is further reinforced when shared as a family unit. The Disney Worldwide Conservation Fund awards of $5,000 or $10,000 were made available to extend existing family-based nature play programming or to create new, innovative, and engaging programs. For more information about the recipients and their projects, please click here.

Born June 19, 2014, to mother Bernadette and father Oscar, a pair of female red panda cubs may now be viewed via the cub cam on the Virginia Zoo’s website.

“We’ve just installed a wireless network across the Zoo, so we’ll be adding other webcam feeds, allowing people to see more of the animals that don’t currently inhabit areas viewable by visitors,” said Greg Bockheim, the Zoo’s executive director.

“They are growing very well,” said Dr. Amanda Guthrie, the Zoo’s veterinarian, about the cubs. She noted that one weighed in at 850 grams and the other was 400 grams, adding that it is not unusual for cubs to grow at different rates, as long as they are active and growing, and that they are both feisty and active.
Louisville Zoo Celebrates 1000th Black-Footed Kit

In July the Louisville Zoo announced the birth of the 1000th Black-footed Ferret kit at the Louisville Zoo’s Conservation Center. The kit was named “JoGuy” for longtime black-footed ferret keepers Guy Graves and Joanne Luyster, as well as Black-footed Ferret reproduction pioneer JoGayle Howard. “JoGuy” was born to dam “Rhianna” and sire “Fettuccine” on June 10, 2014.

Black-footed Ferrets (BFFs), once thought to be extinct and long considered one of North America’s most endangered mammals, were reduced to only 18 animals in 1987. Faced with almost insurmountable odds, Black-footed ferrets bounced back from the brink of extinction through the efforts of a multi-institutional recovery program. The Louisville Zoo has been an active participant in the Black-footed Ferret Recovery Program since 1991, producing over 1000 kits and providing over 600 ferrets for reintroduction back into the wild.

The kit, along with its four littermates, will remain with “mom” until early fall when it will either remain in the captive breeding program or be transferred to one of twenty-one reintroduction sites scattered across the North American Great Plains.

For more information on Black-footed Ferret Recovery, check out conservation stories on the Zoo’s website at www.louisvillezoo.org or visit www.blackfootedferret.org.

Ornate Box Turtles Hatch at Lincoln Park Zoo, Prepare to Return to Wild

In September eleven ornate box turtles hatched at Lincoln Park Zoo. The hatchlings are part of an effort to restore the native populations of turtles to their natural sand prairie habitat in Western Illinois, where they will return next summer. The hatchlings come from three different clutches provided by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS).

“Every single hatchling is a success for the population,” said Diane Mulkerin, Lincoln Park Zoo curator. “Each animal represents being one step closer to restoring the natural grasslands and prairies in Illinois, which is necessary for the ecosystem to flourish.”

The turtles will remain at the zoo for the next several months where they can thrive without the threat of predation or disease. Once the animals grow both in size and strength, they will be re-introduced into grasslands and sand prairies protected by the Upper Mississippi National Wildlife and Fish Refuge in Savannah, Ill.

For more information on Lincoln Park Zoo and its re-introduction programs, please click here.