

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Leslie Walsh

Manager of Marketing & Development

(269) 441-9012

Email: lwalsh@binderparkzoo.org



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MULTIMEDIA NEWS RELEASE

Puppies: Rare African Painted Dogs Born at Binder Park Zoo

Binder Park Zoo is celebrating the birth of eleven rare African painted dog pups born on November 30, 2018. All eleven are thriving and receiving attentive care from mom Ghost and dad Verizon in their birthing den behind the scenes at the zoo. Zoo staff has been monitoring their activity via closed circuit cameras to allow the pair and their litter the space, comfort and security they need while ensuring all is well.

“Zoo staff has been maintaining a hands-off approach, giving the family unit privacy and the opportunity to grow and bond without unnecessary intervention,” states Brett Linsley, Manager of Wildlife, Conservation and Education. “Ghost has demonstrated excellent mothering skills and since painted dogs have a complicated social pack structure, it’s preferable to allow that critical bonding and development to happen as naturally as possible.”

African painted dogs are one of the most endangered carnivores in Africa, with an estimated global population of less than 5,000 and declining due to human conflict, habitat fragmentation and widespread diseases like distemper and rabies. The African painted dog is currently listed as Endangered by both the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The scientific name for the African painted dog is *Lycaon pictus*. Also known as cape hunting dogs, wild dogs or painted wolves, these spectacular animals are aptly named for their unusually marked coats of brown, black, yellow and white - unique to each individual. Painted dogs are intelligent and highly social animals as well as successful pack hunters.

Verizon is 11 years old and one of a trio of brothers that came to Binder Park Zoo from the Bronx Zoo in 2012. Ghost was born in the United Kingdom in 2014 and later transferred to the Houston Zoo. She joined the Binder Park Zoo pack in 2017 as a breeding recommendation from a Species Survival Plan (SSP) through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). While

somewhat old for a first-time dad, Verizon's contribution is significant since both his and her genes are underrepresented adding desirable diversity to the North American zoo population.

Binder Park Zoo has had African painted dogs since 1998 with one successful birth during that time. The zoo opened a new painted dog exhibit in Wild Africa in 2017. The new exhibit and holding area are state of the art and designed and built to the highest standards possible. This was made possible by generous donations from Frankie, John and Anne Zanetti and the Santo, Maria, Frankie & John Zanetti Foundation in honor of Andrew Zanetti and Frankie Zanetti. The exhibit is a tribute to both Andrew and Frankie and is a Zanetti family legacy, giving testament to their great love of family and community as well as their admiration for the species. The exhibit is spacious and natural with a pool for the dogs and multiple viewing areas for guests. The holding area was designed to include a birthing den with the hopes of successful breeding. "Painted dogs are one of the most endangered animals in all of Africa rendering our conservation efforts extremely important," says Diane Thompson, President & CEO of Binder Park Zoo." Thompson continues, "While there remains much work to be done, the birth of these eleven pups is a success made possible by an important collaboration between Binder Park Zoo staff and the AZA Species Survival Plan, and the generosity of the Zanetti family."

Born blind, the pups' eyes are now open. Zoo staff has observed that all eleven appear healthy and normal as they venture from the den area to explore their surroundings. "Our first physical contact with the pups will be when they are around six weeks. At that time we will perform a physical examination, determine the sex of the pups, and administer their first vaccination," states staff veterinarian Dr. Kim Thompson.

Guests can see the pups when the zoo opens for the season on April 17. In the meantime they can learn about their progress and see photos and video on the zoo's website and Facebook page.

About Binder Park Zoo

Binder Park Zoo is located in southwest Michigan and home to a diverse array of exotic and native animal species. The natural and spacious habitat design that blends animal habitats into the surrounding landscape is a 40-year hallmark of the zoo that respects animals and delights guests. Delivering the message of conservation through engaging programs and fun experiences lies at the heart of the zoo's mission to *Connect. Inspire. Conserve. Connect people with nature. Inspire them to conserve.* The Conservation Carousel, vintage Z.O. & O. miniature train and trip to the 50-acre Wild Africa exhibit aboard the Wilderness Tram are but several zoo adventures that entertain while making meaningful connections to nature.

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