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Binder Park Zoo

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Is romance in the air? Binder Park Zoo hopes for snow leopard “love”

BATTLE CREEK, MI February 10, 2020 – Snow leopard introductions are underway at Binder Park Zoo! A two year old female snow leopard named Victoria arrived at Binder Park Zoo in August from Omaha’s Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium under a Species Survival Program (SSP) breeding recommendation of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). This breeding recommendation paired Victoria with the zoo’s male snow leopard, Raj, with the hopes of producing a litter of cubs.

In March 2019, the Large Carnivore Act was amended to allow AZA accredited zoos licensure to breed large carnivores with a Michigan state permit. Binder Park Zoo secured this permit and is now approved to breed this species of carnivores as a result of that change. “We are very grateful to everyone who worked on correcting the law,” said Diane Thompson, president & CEO of Binder Park Zoo. Thompson continues, “That effort allows the zoo to elevate its mission of conservation. When guests see snow leopards at the zoo, it’s a special experience that creates awareness and understanding that we *can* make a difference together - for snow leopards and other animals, too.”

Because of the Large Carnivore Act, a law that prevented the breeding of large carnivores in Michigan, the last snow leopard cub born at Binder Park Zoo was a female named Shanti. Shanti was later transferred to Akron Zoo where she has since produced eight cubs, including Raj, born in 2012. Raj came to Binder Park Zoo in 2013 and is a guest favorite.

The zoo’s Animal Care staff have been working to introduce the pair. Kathryn Sippel, Curator of Collections states “We are happy to be able to breed this vulnerable species again – really, it’s an honor, but introducing a new pair is not always an easy task. A lot of time and patience goes into this process.” Sippel said, “We’ve been carefully monitoring both animal’s behaviors and watching for cues from Victoria that she’s ready to meet Raj. Of course there are always risks, but with our experienced, well-trained staff, solid support from the SSP, and two snow leopards who hopefully like each other, we are crossing our fingers for a positive outcome.”

Mating season for snow leopards is January through mid-March and gestation is 98-104 days. The average litter size is 2-3 cubs. A successful snow leopard birth at Binder Park Zoo would not only support conservation efforts but helps fulfill the zoo’s mission to ‘Connect. Inspire. Conserve. Connect people with nature. Inspire them to conserve.’ More information about snow leopards can be found on the Snow Leopard Trust website at <https://www.snowleopard.org>.

Binder Park Zoo will open for the 2020 season on April 16. For more information about education programs, special events and other zoo news, visit www.binderparkzoo.org or follow us on Facebook and Instagram.