

Gladys Porter Zoo's Conservation Program Recognized with National Award

Silver Spring, Maryland (September 29, 2015) – The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) announced that the Gladys Porter Zoo received Top Honors in AZA's 2015 North American Conservation Award for its Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Binational Conservation Program. This annual award recognizes exceptional efforts toward regional habitat preservation, species restoration, and support of biodiversity in the wild.

"The Gladys Porter Zoo is a leader in protecting North American wildlife," said AZA President and CEO Jim Maddy. "Conservation is a high priority for the Gladys Porter Zoo as well as for all AZA-accredited aquariums and zoos, and this award recognizes the team at Gladys Porter Zoo for their commitment to protecting sea turtles and our natural heritage through the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Binational Conservation Program

In 1981, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service asked the Gladys Porter Zoo (GPZ) to administer the U.S. field portion of the joint U.S./Mexico effort to protect and increase the production of Critically Endangered Kemp's ridley sea turtles at their natal beaches located in the State of Tamaulipas, Mexico. Accordingly, for 34 years, GPZ has coordinated, participated in, and helped secure funding for this binational conservation program. The population had been declining at an alarming rate since the 1940s, and when GPZ's involvement began in the 1970s, the possibility of extinction was very real. Activities of the program include the conservation of the Kemp's ridley and other Gulf of Mexico sea turtle species in Texas and Tamaulipas, as well as research projects geared toward the design and implementation of conservation strategies for the recovery of the Kemp's ridley population. Fieldwork conducted on the beaches of northern Mexico, which involves collaboration with many governmental and non-governmental institutions on both sides of the border, includes: relocating wild nests into protected corrals; collecting data on hatchlings prior to release; a tag-recapture study; a satellite telemetry study; a predator monitoring study; a sex ratio study; a reproductive biology study; and, an environmental education program.

Since the onset of this cooperative project, there have been more than 222,000 Kemp's ridley registered nests and just over 12 million hatchlings released into the Gulf of Mexico. The project saw the lowest recorded number of nests in 1985: 702. The highest recorded number of nests was in 2012: 21,797. This increase over 27 project years translates to 3,000 percent. One of the main downlisting demographic criterions for the recovery of the species is the recruitment of at least 300,000 hatchlings into the Gulf per season. Through the efforts of countless organizations and individuals, this criterion has been exceeded over the past decade, averaging over 720,000 hatchlings released annually since 2004.

"Our zoo has been very fortunate to have worked with a multitude of committed partners and to have seen so many successes with the Kemp's Ridley Binational Program. Recovery efforts for

this species were showing promising signs of success through 2009, with nesting and the numbers of turtles comprising nesting aggregations increasing exponentially both in Mexico and Texas,” said Patrick M. Burchfield, Ed., D., M.Sc., director of the Gladys Porter Zoo. “However, recent decreases underscore the vital importance of continued protection efforts – both on the nesting beaches and in the marine environment. And Gladys Porter Zoo intends to remain fully engaged.”

About the Gladys Porter Zoo

The Gladys Porter Zoo is a visitor oriented zoological and botanical park, dedicated to the preservation of nature through education, conservation and research. The Zoo is open 365 days a year and its hours of operation are 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on the weekends. Regular admission for adults is \$10.00 (ages 14 – 64), \$7.00 for children (ages 2 to 13) and seniors 65 and over receive a discounted admission of \$8.50. Children 2 and under are free. For more information, visit www.gpz.org.

About AZA

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and seven other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit www.aza.org.

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