



County of Onondaga
Office of the County Executive

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Media Release

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County Executive Ryan McMahon Announces Birth of Two Amur Leopard Cubs at Rosamond Gifford Zoo

Amur Leopards are the rarest big cats in the world

SYRACUSE, N.Y. – Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon announced that two Amur leopard cubs were born at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo on June 19 and had their six-week health checks Wednesday, July 31, 2019.

The cubs, a male and a female, were born to female Amur leopard Tria and male leopard Rafferty, both age 2, at 3:19 a.m. and 4:45 a.m. on Wednesday, June 19.

According to Zoo Director Ted Fox, the zoo's animal care team has been observing the cubs via closed-circuit camera with minimal intervention to allow Tria to care for them undisturbed and she has proven to be a great mom.

Veterinary staff were able to administer the cubs' 6-week vaccinations today and perform a brief checkup. The male weighed in at 2.83 kg, or 6.2 pounds, and the female weighed in at 2.56 kg. or 5.6 pounds.

County Executive McMahon, who was present at the cubs' health check, said, "The Amur leopard cubs are an absolutely beautiful and rambunctious addition to our state of the art zoo." McMahon continued, "Thank you to the entire team at the Zoo, including the Friends group, for their work and commitment in helping this endangered species and I cannot for the rest of our community to see these awesome baby cubs."

The zoo acquired Tria and Rafferty last year from the Greenville, SC. and San Diego zoos, respectively, as part of the Species Survival Plan (SSP) for Amur leopards. Amur leopards are the world's most endangered species of big cat with fewer than 90 individuals remaining in the wild in their native habitat which is the Amur River Basin in Far East Russia.

This species faces extinction because of habitat destruction for logging and farming, overhunting of its prey by humans and illegal poaching for their beautiful coats. Those in the wild are now protected in a preserve established by Russia in 2012, but the wild population is so small that inbreeding has become another threat to the species' survival.

The SSP, overseen by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), is working to breed a genetically strong population of Amur leopards in human care.

Rosamond Gifford Zoo joined the SSP last fall with the commitment to build an Amur leopard habitat to accommodate a breeding pair and their cubs, Fox said. The zoo will begin construction to renovate the former African lion exhibit into the Amur Leopard Woodland this fall.

The Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo is in the process of launching a fundraising campaign to help fund the new exhibit. Friends of the Zoo President Janet Agostini said the new habitat will include a high mesh ceiling, trees and climbing structures to accommodate the leopards' affinity for climbing.

"The Friends is happy to lead the way to raise the funds to create a new exhibit for Tria and Rafferty," Agostini said. "We are so fortunate to have these beautiful creatures, and now that they have cubs, it's even more pressing that we provide them with the additional space and enriching environment they need to raise their family."

Donations to the Amur Leopard Woodland project can be made at www.rosamondgiffordzoo.org/donate or by contacting Friends of the Zoo Development Director Steve Bergonzi at (315) 435-8511 x8526 or sbergonzi@rosamondgiffordzoo.org.

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is Syracuse's accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the gold standard for animal care, wildlife conservation and guest experience. Visit the zoo's website at www.rosamondgiffordzoo.org and the Friends of the Zoo events site at www.syracusezooevents.org.

The Friends of the Rosamond Gifford Zoo is the non-profit organization that supports the zoo and its conservation missions. Learn more about the Friends at www.syracusezooevents.org/our-story.

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