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Memphis Zoo Breeds Critically Endangered Mississippi Gopher Frogs by *In-vitro* Fertilization

MEMPHIS, Tenn. – The first captive breeding of the endangered Mississippi gopher frogs has taken place at the Memphis Zoo.

Approximately 94 tadpoles are developing at the Zoo in off-exhibit areas. This number is significant given that there are approximately 100 adult Mississippi gopher frogs left in the wild.

This is the second time ever that a critically endangered amphibian was produced by *in-vitro* fertilization. The first time was in the spring of 2004 with the endangered Wyoming toad, also done at the Memphis Zoo.

“We are very excited about this scientific breakthrough at the Memphis Zoo,” said Dr. Andy Kouba, the Zoo’s Director of Research and Conservation. “Hopefully what we have learned here can also benefit other endangered amphibians.”

The fully grown frogs will be about two inches long and have large hind feet made for digging. Mississippi gopher frogs have a dark grayish-brown back with distinctly darker bands on the legs. The belly is creamy white, with occasional dark spots. They have a pointed snout and large eyes, which they cover with their front feet when threatened.

The Zoo’s Mississippi gopher frog conservation efforts were supported by the Morris Animal Foundation and Institute of Museum and Library Services.

In the wild, the Mississippi gopher frogs are found in two shallow, temporary ponds in Harrison County, Mississippi.

The majority of the animals in the wild are located at “Glen’s Pond” in Mississippi’s DeSoto National Forest, about five hours from Memphis.

The Memphis Zoo's scientific breakthrough with the Mississippi gopher frog is timely considering the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) has named 2008 the "Year of the Frog." The Memphis Zoo is an accredited member of AZA.

About the Research Collaborators

The research for the Memphis Zoo's Mississippi gopher frog project included: staff members Director of Research and Conservation Dr. Andy Kouba, Former Research Coordinator Dr. Kary Latham, Research Biologist Rachel Hansen, Aquarium Keeper Deanna Lance. Dr. Steve Reichling, The University of Memphis and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

About the Memphis Zoo

The Memphis Zoo, located in Memphis, Tenn., is home to more than 3,500 animals representing over 500 different species. The Zoo was founded in 1906 and resides on 70 acres in the middle of Overton Park. The Memphis Zoo has completed over \$77 million in renovation and expansion since the early 1990s, making it one of the finest zoological parks in the nation. The Zoo's animal inhabitants reside in one-of-a-kind exhibitry, such as Once Upon A Farm, Commercial Appeal Cat Country, Primate Canyon, Animals of the Night, Northwest Passage and CHINA - home to giant pandas Ya Ya and Le Le. The Memphis Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. Memphis Zoo, Ya Ya and Le Le are trademarks of the Memphis Zoo.

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