

## In the News

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### Zoo Grows Critically Endangered Dusky Gopher Frog Population by 622

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Earlier this month, Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium was part of the fourth and most successful release of zoo-bred dusky gopher frogs to date. In collaboration with the Memphis Zoo, Detroit Zoo, Dallas Zoo and Como Park Zoo and Conservatory, the Zoo released 622 froglets of the critically endangered species into restored habitat in Mississippi on July 10 – 11. Of those released, 387 were bred in Omaha.

The release is part of an ongoing, large-scale effort to establish a new self-sustaining population of dusky gopher frogs. At one point, only about 75 adult dusky gopher frogs remained in the wild. Following this year's release, 821 frogs can be found in the Mississippi habitat.

A recent study conducted by Dr. Betsy Roznik, a post-doctoral research fellow at the Memphis Zoo, shows, for each release since the onset of the program in 2017, about 75 percent of the froglets survived their first month of habitation and expressed natural behaviors. The froglets are tracked with the help of VI Alpha Tags, small fluorescent tags designed with an alphanumeric identification code, that are inserted into the froglets' thighs.

The released froglets were produced through an in-vitro fertilization procedure and the collaborative efforts between the Zoo's Amphibian Conservation Area and Reproductive Sciences Department, the Memphis Zoo and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The procedure is a 15-day process that spans four weeks and uses 62 adult frogs.

Dusky gopher frogs, also referred to as Mississippi gopher frogs, were identified as an endangered species in 2001 and are currently listed as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium has been working with the frogs through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Dusky Gopher Frog Species Survival Plan (SSP) since 2004. This is the fourth amphibian species to be released to its natural habitat from the Zoo's Amphibian Conservation Area since its inception in 2007.

Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium's Amphibian Conservation Area was developed in 2007 as an ambitious project to continue to enhance the Zoo's commitment to helping with the Global Amphibian Extinction Crisis. What began with two species and two isolation rooms has evolved into more than 20 species of endangered amphibians in a high

quarantine area. This 4,200 square-foot off-exhibit space consists of 13 individual rooms, each with its own heating and cooling unit, as well as the capability to produce feeder insects in-house. Of the 17 endangered species in the Amphibian Conservation Area, four have been returned to the wild with 58,125 individual specimens represented.