



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2020

## Four Pallas' Cat Kittens Born at the Birmingham Zoo

**BIRMINGHAM, AL** – The Birmingham Zoo is thrilled to announce that our 3-year-old female Pallas' cat Mischa gave birth to four kittens on April 10 after 67 days of gestation. The kittens were conceived through natural breeding with our male Pallas' cat Bataar, and all were born in a comfortable nesting den off-habitat in the Zoo's Predator Building.

Mischa is a first-time mother and has been very attentive while displaying ideal behaviors such as nursing and grooming. In order to assess the kittens' development, animal care and veterinary staff will closely monitor via a camera feed.

All four kittens and their mother seem to be active and healthy. Animal care and veterinary staff will perform the first visual check of the kittens when they are two weeks old and their first physical exam will be performed at eight weeks. At that time, care teams will be able to determine the sex of each kitten. Pallas' cat kittens start to open their eyes at about 20 days of age, and we expect them to emerge from the nest den when they are about one month old.

Pallas' cats are near-threatened in the wild and their populations continue to decline. The birth of four kittens is impactful news for the broader Species Survival Plan (SSP) program and aids in the sustainability of the Pallas' cat population. The Birmingham Zoo joins other zoos around the world in maintaining SSP programs through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), for cooperative breeding and conservation initiatives.

"We are all very happy for this wonderful news—our first Pallas' cat kittens in over two decades at the Birmingham Zoo," says Chris Pfefferkorn, President & CEO. "Mischa's litter is significant for the Zoo and crucial for the Pallas' cat species. We are the only AZA-accredited Zoo in the state of Alabama, and we take pride in being a part of the conservation of wildlife and wild places. Species Survival Plan programs align with the Zoo's mission of *Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World*."

"I hope the birth of the kittens will encourage people to learn more about how the Zoo is contributing to the conservation of this amazing species," says Scott Kayser, Lead Animal Care Professional in Predators and Vice Coordinator of the Pallas' cat SSP. Kayser has conducted research on Pallas' cats in Central Asia, as a grant recipient of the Birmingham Zoo's *Passion Into Conservation Action* (PiCA) program.

"Pallas' cats are a small population, so every birth is important," says Hollie Colahan, Vice President of Living Collections. "The Zoo's animal care and animal health teams have worked hard with Mischa to prepare for this long-awaited moment." Colahan is also the Vice Chair of the Felid Taxon Advisory Group that oversees all cat SSP programs, and Coordinator of the Lion SSP, and the African Lion SAFE conservation program.

Mischa was born at the Columbus Zoo in May 2017 and came to the Birmingham Zoo in December 2017. Bataar, the father, was born at Utah's Hogle Zoo in 2018 and arrived at the Birmingham Zoo in early 2019. The pair was recommended to breed by the Pallas' cat SSP, and they are both first-time parents.

### Photo of Birmingham Zoo Pallas' Cat Kittens



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### ABOUT THE BIRMINGHAM ZOO

The Birmingham Zoo is an independent, not for profit, 501(c)(3) organization and is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

### OUR MISSION *Inspiring Passion to Conserve the Natural World*

Approximately 700 animals of 230 species call the Birmingham Zoo home, including sea lions, zebras, rhinos and endangered species from six continents. The Birmingham Zoo is the only AZA accredited Zoo in the state of Alabama.

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