

Lincoln Park Zoo launches first-of-its-kind wildlife reintroduction database

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On April 15, during the first International Wildlife Reintroduction Conference in Chicago, Lincoln Park Zoo announced the launch of a scientific resource called the Avian Reintroduction & Translocation Database (ARTD). The first of its kind, this comprehensive, standardized directory will serve as a valuable tool for wildlife managers and reintroduction scientists.

The ARTD database centralizes information about 128 species of birds, 405 release sites worldwide and 1,207 wildlife release events. From Puerto Rican parrots, California condors, Guam rails and Bali Mynah to Hawaiian honeycreepers and European vultures, the database describes every aspect of the reintroduction effort for each species including the variables that impact the efficacy of releases, ranging from the species' biology and ecology, habitat suitability, demography, and genetics to management.

Lincoln Park Zoo population biologist Joanne Earnhardt, Ph.D. spearheaded the effort after discovering the urgent need for such a resource when she and colleagues were working to save critically endangered birds from the island of Guam. The birds had been nearly exterminated by an invasive tree snake. Zoo-based breeding efforts have been successful and efforts for reintroduction are currently underway. Unfortunately, in the research and planning stage for reintroduction, finding details about past reintroductions of similar species was a daunting task.

“Reintroduction programs can be expensive, complex and risky. Biologists research extensively before undertaking such an effort. Hundreds of avian reintroductions have taken place over the past two decades, but gathering information about these projects is difficult because the information is spread out over so many different sources and media,” explained Earnhardt. “The (ARTD) database pulls all this information together into one scientific resource, thereby promoting the sharing of information to help conservationists design future programs based on lessons learned from the past.”

Many wildlife populations throughout the world are suffering dramatic declines in size or are already extirpated. It is estimated that one in eight bird species is facing extinction. Habitat loss and degradation and the consequences of climate change are likely to further reduce the survival of many species, disrupt their distributions and disturb ecological function. An established conservation strategy to enhance the restoration of locally extinct populations is the reintroduction of zoo-bred and wild animals.

“Within the scientific community we are working on new innovative approaches and a new culture of reintroduction science to improve the probability of success,” said Earnhardt. “Centralizing reintroduction data is one approach to help us achieve this goal.”

The ARTD database is not only available to the scientific community, but will also become a valuable educational resource for the general public. The ARTD database is available through Lincoln Park Zoo’s website at: www.lpzoo.org/ARTD

Source: Lincoln Park Zoo

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