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**THREE ZOOS IN ARIZONA, CALIFORNIA, AND TEXAS
JOIN THE RATTLESNAKE CONSERVANCY IN CRITICAL RECOVERY PROGRAM
FOR NEW MEXICO RIDGE-NOSED RATTLESNAKES**

VIDEO RELEASE: Documentary Short on Project Obscurus Now Available [HERE](#)

TUCSON, AZ - November 1, 2024 - The Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Los Angeles Zoo, and San Antonio Zoo have partnered to join Phase I of The Rattlesnake Conservancy's "Project Obscurus," a landmark international recovery program for the federally threatened New Mexico Ridge-nosed Rattlesnake (*Crotalus willardi obscurus*). The three zoos will participate in a head-start breeding program aimed at bolstering and diversifying the genetics of the U.S. populations of this rattlesnake through selective managed breeding and eventual release of offspring into native habitat.

"I am incredibly proud of the collective commitment to this project," said Tony Daly-Crews, Project Obscurus Director at The Rattlesnake Conservancy. "This is the largest assisted migration effort ever undertaken for a rattlesnake species, and I believe it will be pivotal in recovering the U.S. population. Conservation knows no borders, and the support from all involved, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Recovery Challenge Grant, has been indispensable."

A documentary short filmed on location during Phase I of Project Obscurus was recently released on YouTube and is now available for viewing [here](#).

In August 2024, more than 40 conservation experts convened in Sierra San Luis, Mexico to complete the Phase I of "Project Obscurus" which included collection of wild snakes that will be part of the initial zoo breeding programs at Los Angeles Zoo, San Antonio Zoo, and Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. Each of the three zoos collected 10 specimens during Phase I, which have been transported to the zoo facilities to serve as founders for the breeding program. In doing so, Phase I laid a solid foundation for the recovery project, and all activities have been conducted under appropriate permits in both the U.S. and Mexico.

Several of the snakes have already contributed to the program, with successful births recorded at all three zoos. It is a live bearing species and does not lay eggs. A total of 20

babies have been born so far this year. Once these young snakes mature, they will be candidates for release to the wild in the future.

“Climate change and its impact on fire ecology have had the largest influence on this species' decline in the U.S.,” said Andrew Holycross, Ph.D., research associate, The Rattlesnake Conservancy. “The New Mexico Ridge-nosed Rattlesnakes are a high montane species closely linked to specific habitats. Their natural history and ecological role underscore the importance of this project.”

New Mexico Ridge-nosed Rattlesnakes are one of two federally protected species of rattlesnake in the U.S., which serve important roles in their ecosystem as both predators, and sometimes prey. Despite their shy nature and habit of avoiding humans, their numbers have drastically declined in recent decades.

Classified as Threatened by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the New Mexico Ridge-nosed Rattlesnake is a small (up to 66 cm in length) montane pit viper species that is usually pale gray to gray-brown and does not have prominent facial markings. It gets its name from the characteristic long triangular head with a sharp, up-turned edge along its upper snout. The back is marked with pale crossbars lined with darker coloration along the front and back edges. Native to Northwest Mexico, the species historical range includes Arizona, New Mexico.

Led by the Rattlesnake Conservancy, Phase I was made possible by volunteers, researchers, international partners, and a supportive landowner. Partners include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Arizona Game & Fish Department, and the U.S. Forest Service – Coronado National Forest, New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), USGS San Diego Field Station, USGS Fort Collins Science Center, San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge, partnering researchers from the Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes and the IUCN Viper Specialist Group, animal care teams from the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, Los Angeles Zoo, and San Antonio Zoo, Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic, Natura Prima, Chiricahua Desert Museum, Rattlesnake Solutions, and many other volunteers.

“I am really proud that this is an international effort to conserve fauna in Mexico and the U.S.,” said José Jesús Sigala-Rodríguez, Ph.D, IUCN viper specialist group, Universidad Autónoma de Aguascalientes. “It evolved from conversations with a few key people and now we are using Mexican populations of this species to augment populations in the United States. Science and biodiversity do not recognize boundaries and we should continue to foster partnership with the best people to help species like the *Crotalus willardi obscurus*.”

More information about “Project Obscurus” and Phase I of the project can be found at savethebuzztails.org/project-obscurus.

About The Rattlesnake Conservancy

The Rattlesnake Conservancy is a leading nonprofit organization dedicated to the conservation of rattlesnakes and their habitats. Through research, education, and on the ground conservation programs, we strive to protect these crucial species and their ecosystems.

About the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum

Founded in 1952, the Desert Museum is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization widely recognized as a model institution for immersive and innovative interpretation of native plants and animals in their natural habitat. The 98- acre Desert Museum in Tucson, AZ is regularly recognized as a top-tier facility due to its pioneering approach to interpreting the complete natural history of a single region. It is a zoo, botanical garden, art gallery and natural history museum, all rolled into one. The mission of the Arizona- Sonora Desert Museum is to inspire people to live in harmony with the natural world by fostering love, appreciation, and understanding of the Sonoran Desert. To learn more, visit www.desertmuseum.org.

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