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Rare, Endangered Ocelot Kitten Born at the Desert Museum

This birth (among others) gives hope to future ocelot generations

Tucson, AZ (April 25, 2019) — Springtime often symbolizes new life. This year, the Desert Museum welcomed the birth of a rare ocelot in March. The kitten was born to the Museum's resident adult female ocelot. This monumental birth was the result of collaborations with the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden's Center for Conservation and Research of Endangered Wildlife and El Paso Zoo. Between the three establishments, two litters of ocelots have been born, following artificial insemination (AI) with frozen semen. The first (and last) ocelot born following AI with frozen semen was born more than 24 years ago.

For the two AI pregnancies, the female ocelots were treated with oral progesterone for 30 days to suppress ovarian activity prior to two gonadotropin injections to induce follicular growth and ovulation precisely for a 'fixed-time' AI procedure. For AI, the females were anesthetized and inseminated laparoscopically into each oviduct with frozen-thawed semen during procedures performed at each zoo over two consecutive days in December 2018. At ~50 days after AI, fecal progesterone analysis was used to confirm pregnancy and both females subsequently gave birth 82 days post-AI to one kitten (a female) at the Desert Museum and four kittens (with one male and one female surviving) at El Paso Zoo.

Ocelots (*Felis pardalis*) are among Arizona's rarest mammals. These medium-sized, short-haired cats are one of the 25 endangered animal and plant species that are represented in the Museum's collection. Long term survival of a thriving and healthy ocelot population in the Sonoran Desert faces serious odds. One of the most serious concerns that threatens these cats is ongoing loss of habitat. Elusive and solitary, ocelots prefer habitats that offer dense cover (thorn scrub, live oak, and riparian areas), and the expansion of human habitat and commerce is quickly eliminating these areas.

In order to help these camouflaged cats survive in the wild, the Museum supports the Species Survival Plan (SSP) program which is coordinated by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). This plan makes breeding, management, and conservation of endangered ocelots a priority. The ocelot SSP oversees approximately 95 ocelots cared for at 52 North American zoos and the Desert Museum's resident female ocelot was selected as an ideal candidate for the AI program because of her Brazilian lineage. She was artificially inseminated from semen samples that were collected and frozen in 2010 from a male ocelot, Principe. The sixteen-year old ocelot is currently residing at the Houston Zoo. Principe is not only father to the Desert Museum's newest kitten, but also to two kittens at El Paso Zoo.

While the adult female ocelot and her kitten are currently not visible to the public, visitors can still come visit our resident male ocelot and view adorable pictures of the kitten on the Museum's Facebook page.

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Focused on the preservation of the Sonoran Desert, the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum will turn your idea of a museum inside out. Set on a 98-acre botanical garden, a two mile walking trail features 230 animal species, an art gallery, an aquarium, educational activities, one of the world's most comprehensive regional mineral collections, and more. Ongoing conservation and research programs enhance everything we do. The Desert Museum is open every day from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Plan your visit at www.desertmuseum.org.