

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Brevard Zoo Welcomes First Critically Endangered Chicks of the Season

MELBOURNE, Fla., April 10, 2024 – Brevard Zoo has welcomed the first two Florida grasshopper chicks hatched for the 2024 breeding season. Every birth is crucial for this critically endangered species as we work with our conservation partners to increase their population.

Once they have matured and been medically cleared, the chicks will likely be released into their natural range in Central Florida to boost the population of their species. Only three years ago, around 100 members of this species were found in their natural range. So far, the sparrows at the Zoo have surpassed that number, hatching 116 chicks in the two years the Zoo team has been managing the conservation breeding program for this species.

The Florida grasshopper sparrow population in their natural range is in a steep decline due to habitat loss, disease, limited genetic diversity, and nonnative fire ants (which can invade nests and feed on chicks).

Peg and Eddie are the parents of the first two sparrow chicks to hatch. This pair, along with three others, were genetically matched by a team of Florida grasshopper sparrow experts to ensure a healthy and genetically diverse population of sparrows. The experienced parents are "doing a great job of going to hunt crickets and wax worms to feed to the chicks," shared Conservation Coordinator Kelly Currier.

The Zoo's sparrows live in a behind-the-scenes area. The eggs were incubated for just 10 days before hatching. The other Florida grasshopper sparrow pairs - Ava and Gator, Wild One and Vince, and Zoey and Lando - are at different stages of the nesting process. The males of this species "buzz" and sing special songs as a part of the courtship process as well as to establish their area.

The newly hatched sparrows will stay with their parents for 21 days, after which they will be moved to another behind-the-scenes habitat at the Zoo and be monitored to confirm they are doing well on their own before being released into their natural range. This also allows their parents to continue to breed and lay eggs throughout the breeding season, which can go through September.

The chicks will be given color bands on their legs before they leave the Zoo, which allow biologists to identify and track each bird so they can continue to gather valuable information on this critically endangered species. Birds born at our Zoo have been spotted in their natural habitat - some starting their breeding season as well.

It's the best possible news, Kelly said. It means our resident parents helped them be strong enough to survive the challenges of the wild and taught their chicks how to be adult sparrows.

"We're so happy to provide them with the right habitat and atmosphere plus the right food items for parents to be able to teach their hatchlings all of these things," Kelly said.

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About Brevard Zoo

Brevard Zoo is home to more than 800 animals representing 170 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at www.brevardzoo.org.