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## **Riverbanks Zoo and Garden's Gecko Breeding Program Receives Award from Association of Zoos & Aquariums**

**Silver Spring, Maryland (April 23, 2019)** – The Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) has recognized the work of zoological professionals in the Henkel's leaf-tailed gecko Species Survival Plan® (SSP) Program with AZA's 2019 SSP Sustainability Award.



AZA's SSP Program oversees sustainable population management of over 500 species through a variety of species conservation, research, husbandry, management, and educational initiatives. Through this program, expert advisors work together to manage the demographic distribution and genetic health of animal populations within AZA member facilities.

"Collectively and responsibly managing our animal populations for the future is one of the most important things we do," said Candice Dorsey, Ph.D., Senior Vice President of Conservation, Management and Welfare Sciences at AZA. "The individuals at AZA-accredited facilities collaborating on the Henkel's leaf-tailed gecko SSP are dedicated to assuring the genetic and demographic diversity for the animals in our care. The Wildlife Conservation and Management Committee is proud to honor their accomplishments with this award."

For more than twenty years, the Henkel's leaf-tailed gecko (*Uroplatus henkeli*) has been a mainstay in AZA herpetology populations. Since that time, the gecko has been in a boom and bust cycle, leading to years of plentiful surplus interspersed with periods when little-to-no captive offspring were available. Between 1992 and 2004, the gecko experienced drastic swings in its population, climbing to as many as 181 geckos in 1999 and then declining to 39 individuals in 2004.

In 2012, the AZA's Lizard Advisory Group designated Henkel's leaf-tailed gecko as a yellow SSP with a living population of 108 individuals at eleven institutions and a target population of 150. While this was a solid base upon which to build, the program, led by Riverbanks Zoo and Garden, continued to face a number of challenges in order to reach a more sustainable level, including high mortality that was outpacing reproduction, not enough holding and breeding institutions, the need to increase the number of effective founders and finding a solution to the increasing male bias in the population. With these hurdles identified, the SSP began to take steps to address them, including educating other facilities on the latest protocols regarding husbandry, reproduction, medical issues, dynamic exhibit design for the leaf-tailed gecko.

"Once we were able to identify and address the challenges, we saw a significant shift in successful hatches," said Sean Foley, SSP Coordinator and Herpetologist at Riverbanks Zoo and Garden. "The results have actually been pretty dramatic, and the SSP continues to make great strides in producing a more sustainable population."

The population has exploded and now stands at 365 individuals at 42 institutions. The program has been so successful that 60 geckos were able to be exported to European Association of Zoos and Aquaria institutions to help bolster their breeding program for this species.

## **About AZA**

Founded in 1924, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the advancement of zoos and aquariums in the areas of conservation, animal welfare, education, science, and recreation. AZA is the accrediting body for the top zoos and aquariums in the United States and ten other countries. Look for the AZA accreditation logo whenever you visit a zoo or aquarium as your assurance that you are supporting a facility dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for you, and a better future for all living things. The AZA is a leader in saving species and your link to helping animals all over the world. To learn more, visit [www.aza.org](http://www.aza.org).

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