



NEWS ADVISORY

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Potter Park Zoo Participates in Statewide Conservation Study

LANSING, MI --- Potter Park Zoo, Michigan State University and Central Michigan University are teaming up for a second year to conduct a groundbreaking conservation study tracking the habits of two snake species native to Michigan.

Veterinary staff at Potter Park Zoo are participating in a collaborative effort to investigate the habitat requirements of Eastern Fox Snakes and Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes. Currently Eastern Fox Snakes in Michigan are listed as threatened. The Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake is a species of special concern but is under consideration to become a nationally threatened species.

"The habitat for both of these species of snakes is diminishing, and the research we are doing helps to determine what we can do to better protect them for future generations to come," said Dr. Tara Harrison, the zoo's veterinarian and animal curator.

The project includes researchers from Michigan State University and Central Michigan University. The research is funded through grants from MSU, CMU, Potter Park Zoo Docent Association, and the Morris Animal Foundation. In addition to leading the study, Potter Park Zoo is donating facilities for surgeries and housing for the animals.

The study entails capturing snakes and implanting them with tracking devices to monitor their movements in their natural habitat, as well as their overall health. By the end of this summer, 35 snakes will have been captured for the project including approximately 20 Eastern Fox Snakes and 15 Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnakes. Student research assistants from MSU and CMU collect data sent back from the tracking devices and map out the movements of each animal. Snakes will be monitored regularly throughout the spring and summer, and periodically in the fall for the next two years.

Potter Park Zoo annually participates in studies involving the conservation of the Massasauga Rattlesnakes. 2009 marks the second year the zoo has participated in research involving the Eastern Fox Snake.

Potter Park Zoo is located at 1301 S. Pennsylvania Ave. within Potter Park along the Red Cedar River in Lansing, Michigan. The zoo is open daily year-round, summer hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. in the summer. For more information, call 517.483.4221 or visit www.potterparkzoo.org

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