



For Immediate Release

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ARE ATLANTANS VISITING SOME OF THE WORLD'S LAST TURTLES?

New report lists species housed at Zoo Atlanta among the planet's rarest

ATLANTA – March 2, 2011 – One might assume that an animal with a shell has one of nature's greatest built-in security systems. If that were true, there might not be a need to identify 2011 with the conservation imperative, "Year of the Turtle." But according to a new report issued by a consortium of conservation groups, many of the turtles currently housed at Zoo Atlanta are among the last of their kind.

Issued by the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Turtle Survival Alliance and the Turtle Conservation Fund on February 21, 2011, the report included an alarmingly long list of turtle species now at risk of extinction. Three of the 25 species listed at "extremely high risk of extinction" are represented at Zoo Atlanta: the McCord's box turtle; Burmese star tortoise; and Sulawesi forest turtle. An additional six identified as "very high risk" – the Pan's box turtle; Arakan forest turtle; flat-shelled spider tortoise; radiated tortoise; common spider tortoise; and Georgia's own bog turtle – are also represented at the Zoo.

"The rate at which we're seeing turtles decline in the wild makes it hard to make much distinction between words like 'extremely' and 'very,'" said Dwight Lawson, PhD, Deputy Director at Zoo Atlanta. "And the fact that there's a Georgia species on that list makes it clear that this isn't just a phenomenon seen in far-off parts of the world."

While the bog turtle is most threatened by habitat loss, most of its endangered cousins around the world are declining as a result of extreme over-harvesting for food, particularly in Asia, where high demand for turtle meat has already resulted in extinction of some species. Zoo Atlanta is an active partner in the Turtle Survival Alliance (TSA), an international conservation initiative composed of public and private sector animal management and zoological organizations, academics and veterinarians. TSA manages collaborative breeding programs and husbandry of turtles at partner facilities worldwide, including Zoo Atlanta.

"We want our Members and guests to appreciate turtles for their beauty and diversity, but we also want them to understand the plight facing turtles in the wild," said Lawson, who currently serves as Vice President of TSA. "The story we tell here at Zoo Atlanta isn't one of gloom and doom. It's a message of hope for the

things we as individuals can do in our own lives to put an end to unsustainable trade of wildlife around the world and here in the U.S.”

Zoo Atlanta is a recognized center of excellence for the care and study of vanishing reptiles and amphibians. The World of Reptiles is home to more than 500 individual animals, many of them endangered or critically endangered. Guests interested in learning more are encouraged to visit *Trader's Alley: Wildlife's Fading Footprints*, an interactive series of educational exhibits devoted to the global problem of the wildlife trade.

About Zoo Atlanta

An accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Zoo Atlanta inspires value and preservation of wildlife through a unique mix of education and outdoor family fun. From well-known native wildlife to critically endangered species on the brink of extinction, the Zoo offers memorable close encounters with more than 1,000 animals from around the world. Opening in March 2011 is Complex Carnivores, a new series of exhibits featuring bush dogs, fossa and binturong. Zoo Atlanta is also proud to be one of only four zoos in the U.S. that giant pandas call home: Lun Lun's newest cub, born November 3, 2010, makes his public debut in spring 2011. Other highlights include the nation's largest collection of western lowland gorillas, the nation's largest zoological collection of orangutans and a global center of excellence for the care and study of vanishing reptiles and amphibians. The Zoo is open daily with the exceptions of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Keeper talks, interactive wildlife shows, education programs and special events run year-round. For more information, call 404.624.WILD or visit zooatlanta.org.

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