

Written by Melissa Larsen

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Did you know there are only 131 gray wolves left in the wild? With that in mind, [Ottawa University-Arizona](#) (OUAZ) partnered with the [Phoenix Zoo](#) to sponsor its Mexican gray wolf habitat in an effort to boost awareness of the endangerment this beautiful species. Zoo-goers can even visit the litter of six Mexican gray wolf pups who were born there this summer! Here, Phoenix Zoo and OUAZ officials discuss this unique partnership and how you can aid in saving these precious pups.



In honor of OUAZ's mascot, one of the Phoenix Zoo's wolf pups will be named Fang.

From Linda Hardwick, Director of Communications, Phoenix Zoo

Tell us about this habitat. What can zoo visitors expect?

The family of endangered Mexican gray wolves is made up of parents Tulio and Tazanna, both 3 years old. The litter of six pups consists of three boys and three girls. It is easy to spot the growing siblings in their habitat on the Arizona Trail as their playful nature keeps them wrestling,

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running, tumbling and, of course, napping on their favorite rock pile. At a recent exam by zoo keepers and veterinary staff, the pups were all found to be in great health and each weighed approximately 35 pounds.

How can readers help support the wolf habitat and the overall conservation of the species?

The Phoenix Zoo is part of a cooperative breeding program between the Association of Zoos and Aquariums Mexican Gray Wolf Species Survival Plan and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Wolf Recovery Plan, which aims to restore Mexican gray wolves to their native southwest territory, including Arizona.

With just over 300 individual Mexican gray wolves distributed among 53 institutions in the United States and Mexico, there is still hope for wild repopulation with the influx of modern conservation collaborations. In 1976, the Mexican gray wolf was listed under the Endangered Species Act and the need for advocacy came to light. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Mexico and partner agencies subsequently created a binational breeding program to reestablish wild populations. These efforts are still going strong today.

The goal of the managed breeding program is to make the most genetically diverse matches to support the continued health of Mexican wolf populations in human care and the wild. Zoo populations like the wolves at the Phoenix Zoo help support the ongoing genetic health of wild wolves, and support of the non-profit Zoo by either visiting, purchasing a membership, or making a donation aids the organization to continue their care of these magnificent and elusive species.

From Freda Richards, Marketing Manager for OUAZ

How did the partnership between OUAZ and the Phoenix Zoo come about?

Like everyone else in the Valley, OUAZ staff got caught up in wolf pup fever when the Phoenix Zoo shared photos on Facebook of its newly born Mexican gray wolf pups last May. Patty Tyner, the wife of OUAZ President Dr. Dennis Tyner, had the idea of getting involved with the zoo's conservation efforts on behalf of the endangered species because Mexican gray wolves are so important to the "Spirit" of OUAZ. The university's mascot is a Mexican gray wolf we call Fang. We approached the zoo about allowing the school to sponsor the gray wolf enclosure, and they agreed to allow our gray wolf-spirited pack adopt theirs. It's just a bonus that one of the wolf pups is now named Fang in honor of our support.

From Dr. Dennis Tyner, President of OUAZ

As the mascot of the school, what is the significance of the Mexican gray wolf to OUAZ?

The Mexican gray wolf is one of two sacred animals to the Ottawa Tribe, which is where we get our namesake. The other animal is a river otter, which is the mascot for Ottawa University's campus in Kansas. Ottawa University was started more than 150 years ago with the endowment of hundreds of acres of land from the Ottawa Tribe in exchange for higher education opportunities for members of the tribe. To this day, every member of the Ottawa Tribe receives free tuition and board to our school. Connecting to our school's roots and recognizing that the Mexican gray wolf is indigenous to the Southwest is why our Chancellor, Kevin Eichner, chose that animal to represent our student body in Arizona.

Is the Mexican gray wolf incorporated into any of the educational components of OUAZ?

We see the sponsorship of the Phoenix Zoo's enclosure an educational opportunity. Students can visit the zoo and feel pride in being part of something bigger than themselves and the university, even. What the zoo is doing to support the legacy of an endangered species that is deeply intertwined with OUAZ's history is meaningful in a way that we hope students can connect with in their own way.