

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Woodland Park Zoo's snow leopard sisters are on the move to California Early June offers visitors last chance to see the duo**

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo bids farewell to its 2-year-old snow leopard sisters, Asha and Shanti, who will be relocating to their new home at Big Bear Alpine Zoo in California in June. The first two weeks of June offer visitors the last chance to see the duo at Woodland Park Zoo.



The sisters were born May 2, 2012 to 7-year-old mother Helen and 6-year-old father Tom. Originally a litter of three, the cubs were all born with eye defects and soon diagnosed with ocular coloboma, a relatively rare condition in which the eye stops growing before it is fully developed. This left the girls each with functional vision only in their left eye, and ultimately each had their right eye removed to prevent infection and future complications. The third cub, a male, was euthanized due to multiple severe heart defects causing early heart failure.

During the girls' development at Woodland Park Zoo, keepers and veterinary staff have provided exceptional care to Asha and Shanti, with support from volunteer veterinary ophthalmologist Dr. Tom Sullivan with the Animal Eye Clinic Seattle and, of course, experienced snow leopard mother, Helen. Asha and Shanti are very closely bonded and make a playful team of two in the zoo's Australasia exhibit. Despite their visual challenges, the duo doesn't miss a beat—pouncing and prowling through their grassy, hillside exhibit.

Working with the Species Survival Plan (SSP), a collaborative effort to manage endangered and threatened species populations across conservation zoos, Woodland Park Zoo found a new home for the girls that will fit their unique needs. Big Bear Alpine Zoo is known for its wildlife rehabilitation program, and Asha and Shanti will continue to live together while receiving specialized medical attention.

The cubs' father, Tom, will also move this spring to Oklahoma City Zoo, another move recommended by the SSP to keep the genetic diversity of the snow leopard population always moving and mixing.

Helen will remain at Woodland Park Zoo where she'll be introduced to a new mate through the SSP with the hope that they will breed in the near future. She has raised two sets of cubs and has proven capable of nurturing her babies through even the toughest obstacles.

Endangered and elusive in the wild, snow leopards are hard to track and harder to study. Working with the Seattle-based Snow Leopard Trust, a Woodland Park Zoo Partner for Wildlife, the zoo has seen breakthroughs in research methodologies in the snow leopards' native Central Asia, where techniques like motion-sensor cameras and radio collars are shedding new light on the range, behavior and health of snow leopard populations. Visit [www.zoo.org/conservation](http://www.zoo.org/conservation) for more information.

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