PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | January 28, 2020
Media contact: Gigi Allianic, Meghan Sawyer
206.548.2550 | woodlandparkzoopr@zoo.org

Zoo and Seattle University invite the community to assist with wildlife research
Help identify wildlife detected on 80,000+ photos on camera traps

SEATTLE—*Are you interested in becoming an armchair scientist to help save wildlife from the comfort of your home or anywhere? Would you like to identify wildlife in photos?* Then join Seattle University and Woodland Park Zoo in important wildlife research on wolverines and other local carnivores!

Help is needed from the community to identify more than 80,000 photos of animals detected by more than 65 camera traps, which are motion-activated cameras currently in green spaces and wild places across Washington. The photos provide valuable data for two research projects, the Seattle Urban Carnivore Project and Washington Wolverine Project.

Anyone can become a community scientist and participate. To get started, go to https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/emammal/emammal and click on the "Woodland Park Zoo" button.

Across the two projects, each camera collects anywhere from 200 to 4,000 photos on a monthly basis. Once the photos are collected from the field, animal species in each photo are identified, then coded and entered into a database, explained Robert Long, PhD, director of Woodland Park Zoo's Living Northwest Program and a carnivore research ecologist.

"Up until now, the project coordinators and a few volunteers have been tasked with this process, which can be very time consuming given that there are thousands and thousands of images. But now we have a platform that offers a new and exciting opportunity to get our community involved in the camera photo coding process," said Long, "and you don't even need a science or computer science degree to help us with this important research in our backyard!"

Coding the photos is a pretty simple process. "Random sequences of photos of animals from urban Seattle parks or remote North Cascade Mountain locations will appear," said Kodi Jo Jaspers, a Woodland Park Zoo project coordinator for the Seattle Urban Carnivore Project. "As you look through each photo for one or more animals that triggered the camera, you identify it by selecting the species from the list. Involving a broader audience to code the photos allows us to process more data, at a much faster rate."

The photos currently posted represent the first season of the data collection. "If we get an overwhelming response of community participation, this first phase could potentially wrap up rather quickly," added Jaspers. "We will release more photos in the future as they are detected by the camera traps, so we'll look again to our community for help."

Meanwhile, the community can help the zoo's conservation partner at Snapshot Ruaha, which also needs coding help:
https://www.zooniverse.org/projects/meredithspalmer/snapshot-ruaha

For six years, Woodland Park Zoo, in partnership with U.S. Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station, has been working to study rare montane carnivores such as wolverines and Canada lynx. Through the Washington Wolverine Project, research scientists deploy camera traps and high-tech scent dispensers developed by zoo researchers for use in mountainous backcountry terrain too dangerous to access in the winter. More than 30 cameras and scent dispenser stations are currently deployed across Washington.

Woodland Park Zoo and Seattle University have more than 35 cameras deployed across a range of urban to rural locations throughout greater Seattle. Through this collaborative Seattle Urban Carnivore Project launched in 2019, scientists explore how carnivores—such as black bears, bobcats, cougars, coyotes, red foxes—live and interact with people across the greater Seattle area.

“This project is a great opportunity for people from throughout the region to become directly involved with research on the animals that live, sometimes literally, in their backyards. Through this project our students are able to participate in real-world, community-focused research that is happening right here in Seattle,” said Mark Jordan, PhD, associate professor of biology at Seattle University.

The Seattle Urban Carnivore Project is part of a multi-city research effort, the Urban Wildlife Information Network, coordinated by Lincoln Park Zoo’s Urban Wildlife Institute. The Network is a partnership of researchers across the country who use standardized wildlife-monitoring protocols to understand the ecology and behavior of urban wildlife species. By pooling data across multiple North American cities, the network is seeking to understand why animals in different cities behave the way they do, and what patterns hold true across the continent.

The Seattle Urban Carnivore and Washington Wolverine Projects are among several wildlife conservation projects that Woodland Park Zoo supports through its Living Northwest Program. From western pond turtles and Oregon silverspot butterflies, to raptors and river otters, the projects focus on species recovery, habitat protection, wildlife education and human-wildlife coexistence across the Pacific Northwest.

To donate to the Living Northwest Program, please visit www.zoo.org/donate.

For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

###