

Cownose Ray Born at Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium

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An exciting new arrival was recently welcomed at Wonders of Wildlife National Museum & Aquarium in Springfield, Missouri. On October 22, animal care staff at the aquarium were greeted by a healthy cownose ray pup who had been born earlier that morning inside the Shipwreck Reef exhibit. The birth is an exciting milestone for the aquarium, which opened its doors to the public in September 2017 and was voted "America's Best Aquarium" in 2018 by the readers of USA TODAY.

Animals will only choose to reproduce in human care when they have safe and comfortable living conditions that are conducive to natural breeding behaviors, including healthy gestation and birthing processes. The birth of a pup inside the Stingray Touch Pool is indicative of the excellent work being done by animal care staff at Wonders of Wildlife.

Cownose rays (*Rhinoptera bonasus*) are a species of eagle ray native to the Atlantic Ocean. During

migration, they can be found as far north as New England and as far south as Brazil. The diamond-shaped rays vary in color from gray to brown and feature a "cow nose" shaped head, giving them their namesake.

Cownose rays are listed as near threatened by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), meaning that measures must be put in place to ensure the species does not become endangered or extinct. It takes a cownose ray at least four years to reach maturity; when they do, females only give birth to one live pup per year. These pups are independent at birth, making them immediately vulnerable to ocean predators. A female ray's gestation period lasts somewhere between 10-12 months, which means rays are not able to reproduce quickly.

Cownose rays eat invertebrates like oysters and clams and occasionally feed on small fish like minnows. The rays use a suction-like action to draw food into their mouths, then

grind it between dental plates, similar to human molars. Guests can experience this "suction" phenomenon for themselves by hand-feeding cownose rays and other ray species in the aquarium's Stingray Touch Pool.

Behind the scenes, the month-old pup is being cared for by Wonders of Wildlife staff. When a bit older, she will join her parents at Shipwreck Reef, where guests will be able to visit and feed her too.

About Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium

Johnny Morris' Wonders of Wildlife National Museum and Aquarium consists of an all-new 1.5-million-gallon Aquarium Adventure showcasing 35,000 live fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds, and immersive Wildlife Galleries that bring visitors eye-to-eye with the greatest collection of record-setting game animals ever assembled. Created by noted conservationist and Bass Pro Shops founder/CEO Johnny Morris, the 350,000-square-foot experience celebrates those who hunt, fish, and act as stewards of the land and water. Located next to Bass Pro Shops National Headquarters in Springfield, Missouri the campus is a centerpiece of America's Conservation Capital in Missouri's Ozark Mountains. Wonders of Wildlife has been voted "Best New Attraction in America" and "America's Best Aquarium" by the readers of USA TODAY. For more information, visit www.wondersofwildlife.org.



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