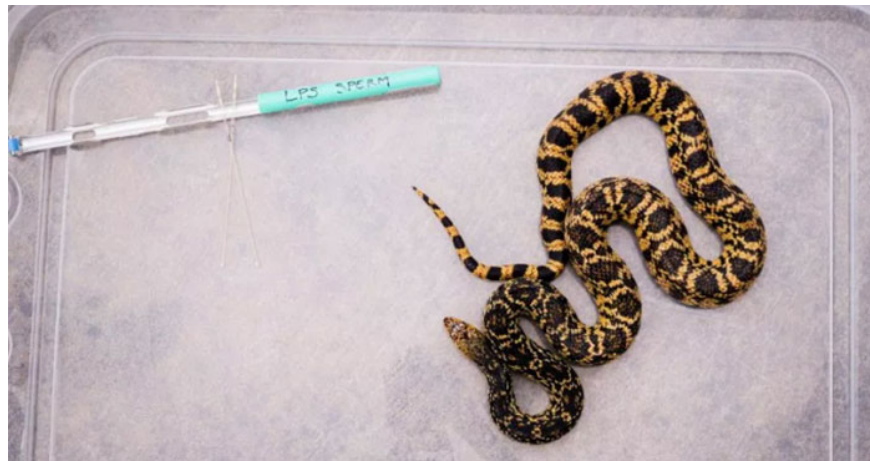


World's first snake born from frozen sperm

Three Louisiana pine snakes were born from frozen sperm on August 27 at the Memphis Zoo, marking the culmination of more than five years of research.

The Louisiana pine snake (*Pituophis ruthveni*) is a nonvenomous snake that kills its prey by constriction. It lives underground in central and western Louisiana and eastern Texas. It traditionally feeds on Baird's bandicoots, but their habitat has been declining since the 1930s.



This snake is listed as threatened by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and could soon become endangered.

Today, Louisiana pine snake populations are small and scattered, making them vulnerable to disease and extreme weather. As populations decline, gene pools become too similar, greatly reducing the snakes' ability to adapt to changing environmental conditions.

A team of experts at the Memphis Zoo collected, frozen, and thawed sperm from a male Louisiana pine snake, then used it to impregnate a female snake. Through genetic testing, the resulting offspring were confirmed to be descendants of the male donor, setting a new precedent in reptile conservation.

This success is a major step toward realizing efforts to improve the genetic health of Louisiana pine snakes and other threatened reptiles in the future, said Tonia Schwartz, associate professor in the Department of Biology at Auburn University.

The Memphis Zoo's success has demonstrated that frozen genetic material can be used to help restore an endangered species.

The Memphis Zoo plans to continue its reptile conservation work, while also collaborating with other organizations around the world to apply this technique to other endangered reptiles.

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