



## Center for Conservation and Research at San Antonio Zoo®

Texas Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project  
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS



Center for  
Conservation &  
Research

THE ICONIC TEXAS HORNED LIZARD IS THE STATE REPTILE OF TEXAS, AND WAS ONCE ABUNDANT ACROSS THE WESTERN TWO-THIRDS OF THE STATE. Since the late 1960s, horned lizard populations have declined or disappeared in many areas due to a variety of factors including deterioration, fragmentation and loss of habitat, the introduction of non-native invasive species such as exotic grasses and red imported fire ants, and pesticide use. Many Texans have fond memories of the Texas horned lizard (aka “horny toad”) and wish for its return to its former abundance.

**The Center for Conservation and Research (CCR) at San Antonio Zoo® Texas Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project seeks to restore the Texas horned lizard population by working with private landowners to introduce zoo hatched lizards into areas where it has disappeared in recent decades. CCR assesses candidate release sites based on several criteria, using remote habitat ranking and boots-on-the-ground surveys. In addition, CCR provides management guidance and assistance to landowners who wish to manage their property for native biodiversity, including horned lizards.**

Establishment of viable horned lizard populations requires production of large numbers of hatchling lizards from CCR’s Lizard Lab. The lab is a 450-square-foot former receiving bay of the zoo’s warehouse that has been modified to include two sets of timer-controlled power outlets (one for UV lights and one for basking lights) and heavily-insulated exterior walls. This room houses all breeder adults, and seasonally serves as the “nursery” for hatchling lizards. Young lizards are introduced to the release site in early fall, and the property is monitored for horned lizard activity at regular intervals. CCR has partnered with Paul Bunker, owner of Chiron K9, to develop the Horned Lizard Detection Canine Network, a group of volunteer handlers and their canines who are trained to find horned lizards. Dogs are trained with live horned lizards, scat, eggs, and shed skin so that they may detect any traces of Texas horned lizards in the field. This partnership with Chiron K9 provides CCR with an efficient long term method for monitoring lizards post-release, and helps to ensure the overall success of the project.



By re-establishing horned lizard populations and encouraging voluntary management that benefits native biodiversity, CCR hopes to not only improve native biodiversity across Texas, but also promote awareness and appreciation of this species for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. **CCR's long-term project goal is to develop replicable methodologies to share with other conservation entities, to ultimately ensure the return of this beloved species to places where its absence is so deeply felt.**

## MISSION

San Antonio Zoo®, operated by San Antonio Zoological Society, is a non-profit organization committed to securing a future for wildlife. Through its passion and expertise in animal care, conservation, and education, the zoo's mission is to inspire its community to love, engage with, act for, and protect animals and the places they live. The zoo welcomes more than a million visitors each year and is open year-round. San Antonio Zoo® is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Zoological Association of America, and Humane Certified by American Humane.

## IMPACT

- On October 9th, 2020, **84 zoo-hatched Texas horned lizards** were introduced into a suitable **2,000-acre habitat** in Blanco County, Texas.
- **80% of Texans** live in areas where the Texas Horned Lizard has been extirpated.
- **Over \$275,000** contributed through direct funds and research grants to programs geared towards re-establishment of horned lizard populations, ecological studies, habitat management, and identification and mitigation of potential causes for decline.



## PARTNERS

The Center for Conservation and Research (CCR) at San Antonio Zoo® Texas Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project is supported by a wealth of partners and collaborators including: Amy Shelton McNutt Charitable Foundation, Cesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute, Chiron K9 and the Horned Lizard Detection Canine teams, Circle Bar Foundation, Elizabeth Hueth Coates Charitable Foundation, Global Wildlife Conservation, Maltsberger-Storey Family Foundation, Nelson Puett, San Miguel Energy, Texas Christian University, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, The Nelson Puett Foundation, Toyota Motor Manufacturing of Texas, V. H. McNutt Memorial Foundation, Winkler Family Foundation, Winn Family Foundation, and many other donors and private landowners.

## NEEDS

**The Center for Conservation and Research (CCR) at San Antonio Zoo® Texas Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project was selected for Texan by Nature Conservation Wrangler based on the project's positive impact to people, prosperity, and natural resources.** Through the program, Texan by Nature is working with the San Antonio Zoo® Horned Lizard Reintroduction Project to address the following needs:

- **Media visibility** to bring awareness to the project, and encourage statewide horned lizard conservation efforts among landowners, businesses, and environmental groups. This media will also connect the project to individuals and foundations who are interested in contributing.
- **Volunteers** and landowners to engage in landscape management practices such as population monitoring, fire ant mitigation, and habitat restoration that benefit the Texas horned lizard and other native species.
- **Diverse funding sources** to complete the construction of San Antonio Zoo®'s Lizard Lab breeding facility for the Texas horned lizard. This expansion will allow for the project to quadruple the capacity of our lizard breeding program.

