



# NEWS FROM...

**FOR: IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**FROM: The Palm Beach Zoo**

**RE: CONSERVATION IN ACTION at the PALM BEACH ZOO**

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**March 14, 2008** - Dr. Karen DeMatteo, the Palm Beach Zoo's bush dog researcher, and her detector dog "Merlin" will be performing simulated search demonstrations in the Zoo's Front Circle on Sunday March 16, 2007 at 10:30 a.m., 1 p.m. and 2:15 p.m.

"Merlin" is a scat-sniffing detector dog and has been specially trained to locate bush dog scat (or fecal matter) in the wild. This exhibition will demonstrate the important work that Dr. Dematteo and "Merlin" performed in Argentina to locate wild bush dog populations.



The "Ecology of the Bush Dog" project was originally funded by the Palm Beach Zoo to assist Karen DeMatteo, Ph.D. and her team of researchers in Mato Grosso, Brazil, to learn about the basic ecological requirements and behaviors of the bush dog. Observations of captive bush dog behavior and recordings of their barks at the Palm Beach Zoo allowed for the development of techniques to lure, trap, and mark individuals in the wild. As a result of these techniques, the capture and release of wild bush dogs allowed for the tracking and observation of these extremely elusive animals in their natural habitat.

The Palm Beach Zoo is one of only five (5) American zoos where visitors can actually see a bush dog. In fact, of the thirteen (13) bush dogs in the country, the Palm Beach Zoo is responsible for the care of four (4) individuals. In recent years, zookeepers have been called upon to assist researchers by gathering samples from these animals. Scat samples collected from pregnant

females residing in the Zoo's collection have provided researchers with critical information about the hormone levels that occur throughout a bush dog's pregnancy. The DNA

samples (including hair, scat, and blood) collected provide scientists with genetic analysis opportunities.

Additional funding from the Palm Beach Zoo was provided during the summer of 2007 in Argentina, where Karen DeMatteo, Ph.D., her small team of field researchers, and detector dog "Merlin," were highly successful at "sniffing out" wild bush dog dens and scat samples. "Merlin's" extraordinary talent to detect the scent of a bush dog was made possible by the donated scat samples from the Palm Beach Zoo. The scat samples collected from Argentina were sent back to a lab in the United States and analyzed genetically through the same methods established earlier with the Palm Beach Zoo scat samples. The genetic analyses of wild bush dog scat and the surveys of wild bush dog habitat in Argentina will provide the researchers with a wealth of valuable information about the bush dog population.

The information gathered by Karen DeMatteo, Ph.D. and her fellow researchers will provide a successful and sound conservation strategy for this species. Bush dog habitat is being lost at an alarming rate to intensive urbanization and agricultural development. The need for surveys and understanding of the dog's basic ecology is essential to their survival.

The Palm Beach Zoo is a non-profit zoological organization located at Dreher Park in West Palm Beach, housing over 1,500 animals within 23 acres of lush tropical habitat. Its mission is to provide an open-air classroom of living creatures to foster awareness, appreciation and respect for the natural world.

All activities are free for Palm Beach Zoo members or with regular paid admission. Palm Beach Zoo is located at 1301 Summit Boulevard, just east of I-95 between Southern and Forest Hill Boulevard. Regular zoo admission: Regular \$12.95, Seniors 60+ \$9.95, Children 3-12 \$8.95, under 3 years and Zoo Members are free. For more information regarding the Palm Beach Zoo and its conservation programs, please visit [www.palmbeachzoo.org](http://www.palmbeachzoo.org).