

## FOUR ENDANGERED ZEBRAS BORN AT WHITE OAK

*Foals bolster the U.S. population, help prevent extinction in the wild*

Yulee, Fla. (Aug. 17, 2020) — White Oak Conservation is pleased to announce the birth of four Grevy's zebras, the world's most endangered zebra species, at White Oak, a wildlife refuge in northeastern Florida owned by philanthropists Mark and Kimbra Walter.

Striking photos of the zebras are available for use by media outlets [here](#). (Mandatory credit: White Oak Conservation.)

The four Grevy's zebra foals (three male foals and one female) were born in June and July and join a long tradition of Grevy's zebras at White Oak stretching back to 1977, when the species first arrived at the refuge from other North American populations. Since 1980, 96 Grevy's zebras have been born at White Oak.

"The Grevy's zebra is near extinction because of severe habitat loss," Mark Walter said. "We simply must preserve more wild spaces around the world. Until then, we'll work to build a backup population of this zebra to hedge against its extinction."

Walter Conservation saves endangered species and preserves large, wild spaces across the globe. It includes White Oak Conservation, a 17,000-acre wildlife refuge in northeast Florida, and millions of acres of reserves in Africa and North America.

Walter Conservation pioneers global conservation efforts through innovative science; species reintroduction; anti-poaching strategies; education programs; and collaborations with other conservation groups and government efforts.

The Walters and White Oak also support and sponsor major conservation and wildlife programs across the globe, particularly with respect to okapi, rhinos, elephants, Florida panthers, Florida grasshopper sparrows, cranes and many other species.

Classified as “endangered,” the Grevy’s zebra is the most threatened of the three zebra species. According to the [IUCN Red List](#), only about 2,000 adults remain in the wild, down drastically from a population of 15,000 in the 1970s.

Historically, Grevy’s zebras could be found in arid and semi-arid grasslands in Eritrea, Djibouti, Somaliland, Somalia, Ethiopia and Kenya. However, today, they survive in only a fraction of their original range in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Grevy’s zebras are adapted to a very dry environment, and can survive up to five days with no water. But increasing competition with humans and their livestock for grazing and for water threatens their survival.

“As the human footprint expands, we are pushing more species to the brink,” said Michelle Gadd, who leads the Walters’ global conservation efforts. “We are working not just to save individual animals in human care, but simultaneously to restore and preserve habitat in the wild.”

The four foals at White Oak are being raised by their mothers. They will stick close to their mothers until a younger sibling is born, usually a year and half later.

These Grevy’s zebras are unlikely to be released into the wild, but they are part of an “assurance population” at White Oak, ensuring that a genetically diverse, sustainable population survives in case the species — already at dangerously low numbers — becomes extinct in the wild.

White Oak provides large areas for extremely rare species to live and breed. For those species where viable habitat remains for them to be released, White Oak aspires to provide healthy, strong individuals for reintroduction programs.

In North America, White Oak has raised and released Florida grasshopper sparrows, Florida panthers and whooping cranes back into the wild. White Oak also has returned American-born bongo, black rhino and roan to Africa, and is working toward restoring numerous other rare species to their native countries, including the dama gazelle.

White Oak's zebras are part of the American Association of Zoos and Aquaria (AZA) Grevy's Zebra Species Survival Plan (SSP). This is one of the most successful survival plans in the AZA, with the population projected to retain greater than 90% of genetic diversity for a minimum of 100 years.

"Grevy's zebras form social groups and live in herds at White Oak, as they would in the wild," said Brandon Speeg, White Oak's director of conservation. "When the young males mature, they'll go to live with bachelor herds." White Oak has enough land — 17,000 acres in total — to provide the space for these teenagers to disperse, like they do in the wild.

The species' unusual name comes from the former French president, Jules Grevy, who received one as a gift from the Emperor of Abyssinia, Menelik II, in the 1880s.

Grevy's stripes are narrower than those of other zebras and end at their white bellies. They have long, narrow heads, and their ears are large and rounded—almost mule-like. In fact, they are more similar to wild asses than to horses.

Facts about Grevy's zebra

- Grevy's Zebra is an endangered species.
- Only about 2,000 adults live in the wild.
- The species has dwindled by more than 50% in the last two decades.
- The species was named after Jules Grevy, a French president in the late 1800s
- Punda milia is the Swahili word for zebra.
- Grevy's zebra is the largest of all zebras
- Their large rounded ears give a mule-like appearance
- They graze on grass, or leaves, if grass is not available.
- They can live without water for up to five days.

### Why the stripes?

There are a few hypotheses about why zebras have stripes. Stripes may help zebras hide from predators in tall grass or may confuse predators, preventing them from getting a sharp focus on individual zebras when they are chased. Biting insects also may have trouble landing on stripes. And foals imprint on their mother's individual stripe pattern, which may help them not get lost amid the herd.

### About White Oak

White Oak is part of Walter Conservation, led by Kimbra and Mark Walter, which saves endangered species and preserves wild places across the globe. White Oak pioneers global conservation efforts through innovative research; species protection and reintroduction; education programs; and collaborations with other conservation groups and government efforts. White Oak's 17,000 riverfront acres in northeast Florida provide a refuge for more than 30 species, 18 of which are endangered.