First-Ever Socorro Dove Chick Hatches at Whipsnade Zoo

Friday 26 September, 2025

AN EXTINCT-IN-THE-WILD Socorro dove has hatched at Whipsnade Zoo in Bedfordshire - the first time the conservation zoo has bred this species. The precious hatchling, which emerged from its egg in late August, marks a hopeful milestone in the global mission to bring the species back from the brink of extinction.

The chick's parents, who arrived from London Zoo in June, are part of an international conservation breeding programme which is boosting the numbers of the rare birds so they can be reintroduced to their native habitat on Socorro Island, off the coast of Mexico.

With approximately 209 Socorro doves left in the world, cared for by fewer than 50 conservation institutions, the arrival of the chick is a significant boost - and along with nine others hatched at Whipsnade's sister-site London Zoo, the Socorro chicks cared for at the two ZSL zoos account for almost 5% of the species' entire population.

Gary Ward, ZSL's curator of birds, said: "To welcome the very first Socorro dove chick at Whipsnade Zoo is an incredible moment for us, but more importantly, it's a step forward for the survival of a species that would have otherwise been lost forever.

"These birds sadly only exist in human care, meaning that those of us looking after them in zoos are uniquely placed to protect the species, and return them to their native habitat in the not-too-distant future."

Socorro doves once lived in the dense woodlands of Socorro Island, but were declared Extinct-in-the-Wild in 1972, after severe habitat loss caused by deforestation combined with the introduction of non-native predators decimated their numbers.

Whipsnade Zoo's tiny chick represents an important milestone for the Socorro Dove Project, an international initiative working to reintroduce this Extinct-in-the-Wild species to Mexico's Socorro Island. The project is a collaboration between ZSL (the conservation charity behind Whipsnade Zoo), key partners in Mexico, Frankfurt Zoo, African Safari, and other zoos within the EAZA (European Association of Zoos and Aquariums) and AZA (Association of Zoos and Aquariums) networks, dedicated to safeguarding the species.

Gary added: "As a world leader in caring for and reintroducing Extinct-in-the-Wild species, and as a driving force in the IUCN SSC Extinct-in-the-Wild Action Partnership, ZSL is leading the recovery of the world's most threatened species - each Socorro dove hatchling is a genuine boost for this work and the Socorro Dove Project."

ZSL has previously helped to recover an Extinct-in-the-Wild bird species - the Sihek - after helping to hand-rear hatchlings of the kingfisher for release onto Palmyra Atoll, marking the first time the birds had been living in the wild for 40 years.

Tim Savage, manager of the bird team at Whipsnade Zoo, said: "Our Socorro dove chick is doing well and growing quickly. It's already taken the first step towards independence by fledging the nest - but will still be reliant on mum and dad for food.

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"Dad has been doing the majority of parenting, keeping the chick company, feeding it, and encouraging it to forage for its own food too."

Every visit to Whipsnade Zoo supports ZSL's vital work to protect species and restore habitats across the globe. Find out more Whipsnade Zoo | A ZSL conservation zoo.

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