

# NEWS RELEASE

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### **Tomistoma Hatchlings Safely Arrive at New Home**

Virginia Beach, VA – On Saturday May 25, the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center’s two 1-year-old Tomistoma crocodiles safely arrived at their new home, Crocodile Encounter in Texas. The trip was a two-day excursion by van, which departed the Virginia Aquarium on Friday morning.

“This is a very exciting, but bittersweet milestone for us,” said the Virginia Aquarium’s Assistant Curator of Fishes, Herpetology and Invertebrates, Colin Walker. “This transfer represents the culmination of more than 20 years of planning and work by the Virginia Aquarium Herpetology Team to join the small group of institutions who have successfully bred this enigmatic, little-known crocodile species.”

For the past year and a half, the Virginia Aquarium has professionally cared for and monitored the Tomistoma’s health and development. As expected, the young Tomistoma have doubled in length and are ten times heavier since hatching at the Aquarium in September 2022. The two female hatchlings recently had their exit exams in preparation for the trip where they measured nearly three feet in length.

The Tomistoma were a result of breeding efforts with the Aquarium’s professionally cared for adult Tomistomas. Two years ago, The Aquarium’s adult female Tomistoma named Sommer laid a clutch of 19 eggs which underwent a 113-day incubation period.

These two hatchlings were the first Tomistoma to be hatched at the Virginia Aquarium as part of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums’ Species Survival Plan (SSP) for this freshwater crocodilian species. Their presence has introduced the first viable new genetics to the population in almost 50 years.

The parents, Ralf and Sommer, were born on Jong’s Crocodile Farm & Zoo in Malaysia, which breeds Tomistoma to support species conservation, and were brought to the Virginia Aquarium in 2015 as the first Tomistoma to enter the United States from a home range country legally since 1973. These two also hold the distinguished position of being one of only six breeding pairs in the United States today.

“Caring for these hatchlings from the day we dug their eggs out of the nest until now has been a truly remarkable experience for the staff,” said Walker. “While it was very sad to see them leave, we all acknowledge that this is the best opportunity for them to contribute to the conservation of their entire species.

“Not only will they serve as a charismatic ambassador to the public for the preservation of their threatened homeland, but the genetic value they hold within them will bring much needed diversity to the US population when they are large enough to pair up with mates of their own. In that regard, their departure from the Aquarium is not only critical to ensuring the long-term health and sustainability for Tomistoma throughout North America; it is also a success very worthy of celebration.”

As the two Tomistoma hatchlings continue to grow, Crocodile Encounter has the facility space to accommodate them as they reach full size. At their new permanent home, they will be named and cared for by the professionals at Crocodile Encounter.

Tomistoma are listed as Endangered on the International Union of Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and listed as Endangered according to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Population threats include habitat destruction, drowning in fishing nets, and overfishing of food resources.

#### Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center

The [Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center's](#) mission is to connect people to the marine environment, inspiring a more sustainable future. The Aquarium aspires to be a driver in conservation, education, tourism, and sustainability, leading the charge to save wildlife and their ecosystems. Owned by the City of Virginia Beach, the Aquarium operates as a city department in partnership with the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation. The Aquarium is proud to be an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums, the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquarium, and the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The [Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center Foundation](#), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, supports the work of the Virginia Aquarium. The Foundation procures and maintains the Aquarium's exhibits, including the animals and habitats. It is also responsible for annual and capital fundraising, administration and funding for the Virginia Aquarium Stranding Response Program, conservation and scientific research efforts, and the Aquarium's mission-related education programs. You can be a part of our mission by making a [tax-deductible donation](#) to support our programming.

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