



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Photos are attached. No media access is available at this time.*

## **Baby Orangutan Born at the Zoo**

Tara, a Sumatran orangutan at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, delivered a healthy female baby in the early morning hours of Saturday, November 22.

The baby is the only Sumatran orangutan born in a United States zoo in 2014, so she represents a significant addition to the population of critically endangered Sumatran orangutans.

"We are thrilled with the outcome so far," said Zoo Animal Curator Mark Weldon. "Tara is doing everything she should to care for her baby."

Zoo keepers and veterinary staff expected 19-year-old Tara to give birth between mid-November and early December. They had been watching Tara by remote camera overnight for several weeks. When keepers observed Tara pacing late Friday in her off-exhibit bedroom, they suspected she was in labor and arrived at the zoo to monitor the birth. Tara's labor lasted a few hours, and she delivered her baby unassisted.

Immediately following the delivery, Tara began cleaning her infant and placed it in her nest – a pile of wood wool and blankets – where she sleeps at night. The baby was first observed nursing Sunday morning.

No name has yet been chosen for the baby. For now, Tara and the baby are staying in the bedrooms adjacent to the zoo's orangutan exhibit.

Tara's pregnancy was announced in October. Orangutans are pregnant for an average of 245 days, or a little over eight months. The baby's father is Tengku, the zoo's 28-year-old male orangutan, who arrived in Fort Wayne from Zoo Atlanta in 1995.

Zoo officials are cautiously optimistic about the baby's future. Because this is Tara's first baby and she has never observed another female caring for an infant, officials were concerned that she may not know how to care for her baby.

To address any potential issues with the birth, zoo keepers spent the last several months preparing an extensive Birth Management Plan. Prior to the birth, zoo keepers used a plush stuffed toy and operant conditioning to train

Tara to bring her “baby” to keepers who could bottle-feed it if Tara failed to nurse. Tara has also been trained to present her nipple to keepers to nurse a baby, in the event that keepers must provide daily care for the infant.

“So far, none of these measures has been needed,” said Weldon. “Tara is proving to be a good mother.”

The breeding of Tara with Tengku was recommended by the Orangutan Species Survival Plan (SSP), a program of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums that seeks to maintain genetic diversity within populations of endangered animals. Tara arrived in Fort Wayne in 2013 from the Columbus Zoo. Lori Perkins of Zoo Atlanta chairs the Orangutan SSP, and she says that only eight other orangutans have been born in United States Zoos in 2014, but all are Bornean orangutans – a separate subspecies from the Sumatran orangutans that are held at the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo. Perkins notes that two other Sumatran orangutans are currently pregnant at other US zoos.

Zoo fans can watch for baby photos on the zoo’s Facebook and Twitter pages in the coming weeks. Zoo guests will have their first chance to see the new baby when the zoo opens for the season on April 25. “Orangutans grow very slowly, so this baby will still be clinging to mom and learning to climb when the zoo opens in the spring,” said Weldon. Orangutans have the longest childhood of any animal other than humans, and require maternal care until they are six to eight years old.

About 320 Sumatran orangutans live in zoos worldwide, and an average of 15 babies are born each year in the world’s zoos. In the wild, these red-furred apes are found only on the island of Sumatra in Indonesia, where the population is in drastic decline due to illegal hunting and the destruction of their forest homes to build palm oil plantations. Fewer than 7,000 Sumatran orangutans remain in the wild. Some experts predict orangutans could become extinct in the wild within a few decades if circumstances remain unchanged.

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**About the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo:** The Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo is northeast Indiana’s largest tourist attraction, hosting more than 500,000 guests annually. The zoo received the 2014 **TripAdvisor Travelers’ Choice Award**, was voted **Indiana’s #1 “Gotta-Do Summer Attraction,”** and is consistently named one of the nation’s **Top Ten Zoos for Kids** by national media outlets.

The zoo is a conservation leader, contributing more than \$80,000 annually to local, regional, and international efforts to protect wild animals and habitats, and participating in cooperative management programs for 15 endangered species.

As a self-supporting facility, the Fort Wayne Children’s Zoo receives no tax dollars for operations. The zoo’s operations are funded entirely by earned revenue and donations.

The zoo is closed for the season and will reopen on April 25, 2015.