

NEWS RELEASE



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CASSOWARY COURTSHIP CREATES CHICK

NORFOLK, Va. – A Virginia Zoo romance produced a bouncing baby ... bird, one of five such births in Association of Zoos and Aquariums accredited zoos in the U.S. over the past decade.

Boris, the Virginia Zoo's male cassowary, incubated the egg and is raising the chick, said Alexandra Zelazo-Kessler, the Virginia Zoo's lead bird zookeeper. "In the cassowary world, fathers do all the hard work."

Zelazo-Kessler noted that when Earline, a female cassowary who came from the National Zoo in January 2012, was introduced to a shared habitat with Boris Feb. 5, 2013, Boris quickly showed interest.

Cassowaries are flightless birds native to the tropical forests of New Guinea, north-eastern Australia and area islands. They feed mainly on fruit, though they are omnivorous and also eat various plant shoots, seeds, insects, and small reptiles and mammals. They are among the largest birds, slightly smaller than the ostrich and emu. Cassowaries are actually very shy, but are capable of inflicting serious injuries with their claws. They have a reputation as world's most dangerous bird, but in reality attacks are rare and usually involve people who feed the birds.

"We're very excited to bring a new cassowary into the world," said Greg Bockheim, the Virginia Zoo's executive director. "We will share what we learn with other zoos raising cassowaries, and hope to use that knowledge to assist with their conservation in the wild."

Sharp-eyed visitors can see the cassowaries on the far side of the Australia exhibit behind the barn, Bockheim added, but the chick may be very difficult to spot as he is brown and less than a foot tall. The chick will be named after its sex is determined.

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CASSOWARY CHICK, 2 OF 2



Doting daddy Boris, a male cassowary, with his chick at the Virginia Zoo shortly after it hatched, June 11, 2013 (Virginia Zoo photo by Wyn Hall).

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As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11 for adults, \$10 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9 for children ages 2-11. Children under 2 are admitted free. Visit www.virginiazoo.org or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.