

NEWS RELEASE



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NEW AT THE ZOO: WALLABIES

NORFOLK, Va. – Wallabies are now receiving visitors at the Virginia Zoo’s Australia exhibit.

“We had a unique opportunity to acquire wild wallabies from New Zealand, where they are not native and not welcome,” said Greg Bockheim, the Zoo’s executive director. “Now the wallabies have a new home, bringing valuable genetic diversity to populations in the U.S. and providing a fitting addition here, as we transition Australia to a walk-through exhibit.”

The Zoo’s Australia exhibit is scheduled to become a walk-through habitat this summer, but the transition may be postponed due to possible nesting by cassowaries adjacent to the habitat. When the transition is complete, visitors will be able to go inside the habitat and walk along a path among the resident animals.

The wallabies, one male and four females, arrived at the Zoo Feb. 28 and spent a month in quarantine inside the Zoo’s new Animal Wellness Campus facility, before being introduced to the Australia exhibit Tuesday. They join eastern and western gray kangaroos, and emus, which were already in the exhibit.

A smaller member of the kangaroo family, Bennett’s wallabies are native to Australia and Tasmania. Primarily grazers, they eat grass, leaves and other plants. Their size averages between 2 and 3 feet tall, and they weigh an average of 25 to 55 pounds. Crepuscular, they are most active early in the morning and late in the evening, spending most of the day resting in the shade. Their powerful tail and hind legs can propel them at speeds of up to 30 mph and they can leap 4 to 6 feet. They are not considered threatened due to large populations, the ability to tolerate a variety of different habitats, and a lack of any major threat from poaching or habitat encroachment.

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A female Bennett's wallaby emerges from a crate into her new habitat in the Virginia Zoo's Australia exhibit Tuesday, April 1, 2014 (Virginia Zoo photo by Alexandra Zelazo-Kessler).

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