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Critically endangered Bornean orangutan born at Virginia Zoo

NORFOLK, VA – The Virginia Zoo in Norfolk is overjoyed to announce the successful birth of a critically endangered Bornean orangutan on June 29, 2024 around 5:45 a.m. The birth represents a major conservation success for the Virginia Zoo, as this baby is only the second-ever orangutan to be born at the Zoo, and for the species as a whole which faces rapid habitat destruction and population loss in the wild.

“The Virginia Zoo has been committed to the conservation and education of orangutans for many years, and we are thrilled to reach a new conservation milestone with this birth,” Executive Director of the Zoo, Greg Bockheim, said. “We feel confident this baby will become a fantastic ambassador for its species, inspiring awe and a sense of care in many Zoo visitors, which is our ultimate goal.”

Both mom and baby are reported to be doing well and are being closely monitored by animal care and veterinary staff to ensure they are bonding. Asia: Trail of the Tiger keepers at the Zoo report that Dara is displaying strong maternal instincts and nursing the baby.

Thanks to the hard work of our Asia: Trail of the Tiger keepers, Dara is well-equipped for motherhood after [routine maternity training sessions](#). She has been trained to present the baby upright to keepers through mesh for visual inspections and supplement feedings if necessary. Prior to the birth, Dara’s care team also conducted [voluntary ultrasound training sessions](#) with her to be able to proactively monitor the baby’s development while ensuring Dara’s comfort. Dara voluntarily participates in training sessions, which help to support her own healthcare and now the baby’s.

“Our care team is over the moon with excitement about the new addition to our orangutan family,” says Jill Strother, Assistant Curator of the Virginia Zoo’s Asia section. “All our hard work in preparing Dara for the birth with ultrasound and maternal behavior training has been so rewarding. We can’t wait to see this little one flourish!”

Dara (24) and the baby’s father, Solaris (21), are a recommended breeding pair by the [Orangutan Species Survival Plan](#), which coordinates population management for the species with the cooperation of accredited and certified related facilities, as well as sustainability partners, of the [Association of Zoos and Aquariums](#). This newborn is their second offspring together. Tragically, the pair lost their firstborn in 2018 to a sudden illness which was not able to be remediated despite the best efforts of the animal care and veterinary teams. Bornean

orangutans give birth to a single offspring typically every 7 to 9 years and may only have 4 to 5 babies during their lifetime, making each birth vitally important to the species' survival.

The Virginia Zoo recently partnered with specialists from the [Great Ape Heart Project](#) (GAHP), an initiative dedicated to the investigation and understanding of heart disease in great apes, to contribute health data from a complete cardiac work-up on its four adult orangutan residents. As a result of this partnership, GAHP generously donated a Pet Map II machine to the Virginia Zoo, which provides animal vital signs like heart rate, respiratory health metrics, temperature and more with the right accessories. With the support of its loyal followers, the Zoo was able to raise funds to purchase accessories for the machine, like cuffs to fit the baby orangutan, during [Give Local 757](#) in April. Having this machine and the proper accessories will increase the amount of health data veterinary staff can collect throughout the babies' life, contributing to the greater understanding of orangutan health and limiting the need for sedation.

About Bornean Orangutans

Found on the equatorial island of Borneo, Bornean orangutans are the largest arboreal mammal and are considered critically endangered by the [International Union for Conservation of Nature](#). In recent decades, more than 80 percent of the orangutans' habitats have been demolished due to humans clearing palm tree forests to harvest palm oil, an ingredient commonly found in baked goods, candy and even shampoo and candles. "Orangutan" means "person of the forest" in the Indonesian and Malaysian languages. They are one of four great apes species, often characterized by their intelligence and similarity to humans. Orangutans share approximately 97 percent of their DNA with humans.

About the Virginia Zoo

The Virginia Zoo, located in Norfolk, Virginia, is home to more than 700 exceptional animals representing over 150 fascinating species. Founded in 1901 and residing on 53 beautifully landscaped acres, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to saving and protecting the world's wildlife by inspiring a passion for nature and taking conservation action at home and around the world. The Virginia Zoo is an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is recognized as a global leader in education, recreation, science, wildlife conservation, and animal care and welfare. For more than a century, the Zoo has connected adults, families and school children with the natural world and its wildlife. To learn more, visit www.virginiazoo.org.

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