



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Friday, October 17, 2025

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Virginia Zoo has new ball of joy - an armadillo pup

NORFOLK, VA – The Virginia Zoo is thrilled to share the birth of a southern three-banded armadillo pup! The pup was born on August 31st to parents Izel (F) and Vigo (M). Izel and Vigo are a recommended breeding pair by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) Southern Three-banded Armadillo Species Survival Plan (SSP), and this is their second successful birth as a pair.

Izel and Vigo's first pup was a female named Malassada, or Molly for short. She was born in 2019 and now lives at another AZA-accredited facility upon recommendation from the SSP. In fact, Molly just had her first pup earlier this year, making Izel and Vigo new parents and grandparents!

Male southern three-banded armadillos do not participate in childcare in the wild, so Vigo is currently separated from mom and baby, but Izel is doing an excellent job raising their pup.

To minimize disruption of bonding between Izel and her new pup, their keepers monitor growth and development with daily visual checks and weekly weigh-ins. At just 9 days after birth, the pup weighed 135.5 grams and their most recent weight taken on October 6 was 422 grams, averaging about 70 grams of growth per week! The sex of the pup has not yet been confirmed, as keepers only handle the pup once a week to weigh them. Southern three-banded armadillos are also the only species of armadillo that can completely curl up into a ball, and keepers cannot visually assess their reproductive anatomy when they are curled up. Their sex won't be determined definitively until the pup is more developed and begins reaching maturity.

Southern three-banded armadillos typically give birth to litters of single pups after a gestation of approximately 120 days. Pups appear to be miniature versions of their parents, with a flexible, leathery shell and hardened, fully developed claws. Newborns are capable of walking and curling into a ball shortly after birth, but they do not open their eyes until about three weeks in age. Within 75 days, pups are weaned from their mother's milk.

The Virginia Zoo's southern three-banded armadillos are Animal Ambassadors and live behind the scenes. Animal Ambassadors are specially trained to be comfortable around crowds, as they attend special events and education programs as up-close representatives of their wild counterparts. Consequently, the pup will not be visible to the public unless they undergo specialized Animal Ambassador training in accordance with the best practices for animal wellbeing created by the Southern Three-banded Armadillo SSP.



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The Zoo is overjoyed to share this SSP success story and will continue to provide updates from our animal care team on our social media channels!

About Southern Three-Banded Armadillos

The Southern three-banded armadillo, also known as the La Plata three-banded armadillo or by their scientific name *Tolypeutes matacus*, is native to eastern Bolivia, southwestern Brazil, the Gran Chaco region of Paraguay, and northern and central Argentina in open grasslands, forests, and marshes. They are the only one of 25 armadillo species that can fully curl up into a ball, using their hard shell to protect themselves. This defense mechanism has made southern three-banded armadillos vulnerable to poachers who collect them for the pet trade, their shells, or meat. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) considers this species to be Near Threatened in the wild.

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. The Virginia Zoo is open daily from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. with last admission at 3 p.m. For admission prices and to learn more, visit virginiazoo.org.

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