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ZOO

Hog Wild

Zoo announces birth of 3 Red River hogs.

Photo by Tad Motoyama, Zoo photographer

Three red river hogs were born here at the Zoo on April 22. This litter, one male and two females, marks the fourth litter for these parents. The piglets and their parents are currently exploring their exhibit, located in the Zoo's Africa section.

"The piglets are being well taken care of by their parents," said Curator of Mammals Jeff Holland. "The father is very attentive to the piglets and will escort them around the enclosure and watch over them until mom is ready to feed them."

At birth, Red River hogs weigh about two pounds. When full grown, they'll weigh between 120 and 264 pounds and reach three to five feet in length. Males grow to be slightly larger than females and males have a large bony protuberance on each side of their snout.

One of the smallest species of pigs, Red River hogs hail from sub-Saharan Africa. These hogs are often described as the prettiest of the "wild swine," with red hair, a black and white face mask and a white mane reaching from neck to tail. Until about three months of age, piglets are brown with yellowish stripes. This coloring serves as effective camouflage.

From roots, to farm grown crops, to wild fruit and vegetables, these hogs don't have a discerning pallet. The ultimate opportunistic eaters, they'll seize the chance to feast on small birds, mammals and even amphibians. They'll also consume carrion, regardless of its state of decomposition.

Red River hogs are predominately nocturnal. However, they will come out during the day when they are afforded protection from their enemies; among which are humans, leopards, lions, hyenas, eagles and rock pythons.

Red River hogs are good swimmers and fast runners. They wallow in mud and are highly vocal animals that communicate incessantly with squeaks, squeals and grunts.

The L.A. Zoo has a large collection of wild swine including the Visayan warty pig and babirusa. The Zoo is also home to the pigs' cousin, the Chacoan peccary. Although peccaries look similar to pigs, they belong to a different taxonomic group than the true pigs of the Old World. In peccaries, the tusks point downward as opposed to upward. They have 38 teeth instead of either 34 or 44 like swine.



Red River hogs and piglets.

ZOO

More Hogs ... and Goats

Baby babirusa and a markhor make their debuts.

Photo by Tad Motoyama, Zoo photographer

On May 10, two babirusas, a species of the pig family, were born. One of the piglets needed special care and is being hand reared in the nursery. The other is with its parents.

Hailing from the moist, swampy forests and thickets of tropical rain forests on the Sulawesi, Togian and Baru Islands of Indonesia, babirusas are swift runners and good swimmers. Preferring to live near bodies of water, they've been known to swim across rivers and seas to reach small islands.

The natives say that the tusks are like the antlers of a deer, hence the name babirusa, which means "hog-deer" in Malay. The males' lower tusks are used to fight rivals for females and territory. The upper tusks appear to have little use as weapons, but instead serve as protection for their eyes by deflecting the blows of the opponent.

Unlike other wild pigs, the babirusas' litter size is small. Measuring six to eight inches at birth, the piglets are a solid gray or brown gray, not striped like most wild pigs when they're born. Hunting, habitat loss and commercial logging have posed a threat to this vulnerable species.

On May 24, the first Tadjik markhors, a male and female, were born at the zoo. Less than a week later, on May 29, a second pair of markhors, also a brother and sister, were born. Visitors can see these boisterous markhors, an endangered species of wild goat native to Asia, alongside their parents in the markhor exhibit.

The most distinct characteristic of the Tadjik markhor is their horns. The male's tightly curled, corkscrew-like horns may reach up to 57 inches. Females' horns twist in the same manner, though they are thinner and flatter and only reach eight to 10 inches in length.

Living at elevations of 1,900 to 12,000 feet, markhors are adept rock climbers from the start. Boasting stocky legs, robust forequarters and broad hooves that provide traction, these wild goats are built for the rocky terrain they inhabit.

Native to the arid Himalaya Mountains of northern Afghanistan and southern Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, this species is critically endangered. Markhors are threatened because of habitat loss resulting from competition with humans, degradation of habitat by livestock and aggressive hunting.



Markhor mom with twins.