

Giraffe Birth Frequently Asked Questions

Why do giraffes need our help?

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), there are approximately 80,000 giraffes currently on the African continent, a 40% loss from 1999 when the populations were at 140,000. Of the nine subspecies, the reticulated giraffe is estimated to have a population size of 4,700 which is down from the estimated 31,000 in 1998, as reported by the Giraffe Conservation Foundation.

Why breed the giraffes at Peoria Zoo?

Because giraffes are threatened in their native habitat, every birth is an important one, giving zoologists, conservationists, and researchers the opportunity to study giraffes and their offspring as well as educate and inspire zoo visitors. In conjunction with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Species Survival Plan (SSP), Peoria Zoo participates with other accredited zoos in cooperative breeding programs dedicated to building healthy, thriving giraffe populations with an emphasis on maintaining genetic diversity. Information gained through SSP husbandry and reproduction programs is used to promote meaningful initiatives meant to foster growth in wild giraffe populations.

Why record the birth?

We have tried to carefully document the birth of our newest giraffe calf. We want to celebrate this incredible birth, while continuing to improve husbandry techniques and share our giraffe birthing experience with other zoos around the world. We hope to increase awareness about the current state of the world's giraffe populations.

A camera was installed in Vivian's maternity holding stall to monitor and record the birth of a baby giraffe. Zoo staff has been monitoring the camera for 24/7 for months in preparation of the birth. When the big moment finally came, we captured the entire process.

What is a baby giraffe called?

A baby giraffe is called a calf. In addition, a female giraffe is a cow while a male is a bull.

What is the size of a newborn giraffe?

An average calf is born weighing 100 to 150 pounds and measuring in at 6 feet tall.

Vivian's baby born on Jan 7, 2018 was 5' 10" tall and weighed 122lb. at birth.

Brother, Finely born on July 25, 2016 was 5'4" and weighed 102.5 lb. at birth.

Father, Taji born on July 15, 2007 weighed ~158 at birth.

Mother, Vivian born on August 15, 2009 weighed 120 lb. at birth.

What is the gestation period for a giraffe?

The average gestation period for a giraffe is 400-460 days.

Vivian's gestation with this baby was 465 days!

What is the lifespan of a giraffe?

In the wild, the average lifespan of a giraffe is 15-20 years. In human care, they've been known to live longer, 20-27 years on average.

What is the labor process?

Giraffes give birth while standing up so a calf enters the world from quite a height. They fall 6 feet to the ground with hooves and head first. The fall may seem like an abrupt entrance into the world, but it effectively breaks the amniotic sac, severs the umbilical cord, and most importantly encourages the calf to take its first breaths. After the calf drops to the ground, the mother will begin to clean it off, and after a few minutes, the calf will attempt its first steps.

How did the zoo prepare for the giraffe birth?

The zookeepers and veterinarians work countless numbers of hours, days, weeks, and years with giraffes to prepare and train them for important moments like these. That includes getting them used to technology and devices that may make the delivery process safe and smooth for baby and mother in healthy situations as well as any perceived emergencies.

In addition to monitoring the maternity camera feed 24/7. One particular object zoo staff uses is called a tamer. The voluntary device is used to keep giraffes in place for ultrasounds, routine veterinary checkups, and delivery if any intervention is deemed necessary during the labor process. **Zookeepers have trained Vivian to walk into the tamer daily to make certain she is comfortable with it leading up to her due date.**

The maternity stall in which Vivian gave birth was specially prepared for the calf's arrival. Staff brought in wood chips so that the calf had a few inches of soft cushioning when she fell those 6 feet during the birth. Zoo staff was also on site with first aid and milk if the calf needed any assistance with nursing.

How soon can a calf walk after being born?

Within 60 minutes of being born, a calf will begin to stand and walk. These first steps are necessary for the calf to be able to nurse from their mother. Within the first day, the calf will also be able to run.

Where do giraffes give birth in the wild?

Giraffes choose to have their babies in places known as calving grounds. Something that's unique about these grounds is that mothers will often return to these lands time after time to give birth. Often, it is the same place they were born because a herd will continue the tradition of using the area for several generations.

What do baby giraffes eat?

A newborn giraffe will begin to nurse from its mother as soon as it is able to stand. By 4 months of age, they will begin to eat solid food (i.e. leaves).

How do mother giraffes care for their young?

In the immediate moments after birth, the mother will start to bond with her calf and lick it clean of the remaining amniotic fluids. She will also be seen encouraging the calf to stand and take its very first steps which will allow the young giraffe to nurse for the first time.

How long do they nurse from their mothers?

Giraffes nurse from their mothers for 9 to 12 months. Male giraffes will stay with their mothers for 15 months before leaving to form a group with other males. Females leave their mothers around 18 months, but will continue to live with their herd.

How do you know when the giraffe is in labor?

Giraffe Calving time is often indicated by signs of discomfort or restlessness.

We recorded Vivian lunging and licking her belly.

Why do the ossicones look flat?

When the calf is born the ossicones lie flat and are not attached to the skull to avoid injury.

For general Giraffe Facts please see our

[Peoria Zoo Giraffe Fact Sheet](#)