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## **Audubon Nature Institute Starts Off New Year with Giraffe Birth at Species Survival Center**

**Typically, the first birth of any year is a big deal. For the conservation partnership between Audubon Nature Institute and San Diego Zoo Global, the initial newborn of 2018 was really big!**

**A 6-foot-tall male reticulated giraffe calf (a typical height for a newborn) weighed in at an impressive 150 pounds when he arrived on the morning of January 9 at the West Bank campus of the Freeport-McMoRan Audubon Species Survival Center in Lower Coast Algiers.**

The average labor for a giraffe is one to two hours. Tumaini, the mother, started giving birth at 6:30 a.m., but the calf didn't make his grand entrance until four hours later.

"It was longer than expected but everything was progressing normally, just slower, so we just watched," said Michelle Hatwood, Curator of the Species Survival Center. "Most giraffe do not need any assistance; we would have intervened only if absolutely necessary."

Hatwood and her staff had known for months that a calf was on the way, but a giraffe's 14- to 16-month gestation period can make it tough to pinpoint a likely delivery date.

Because many animals give birth in the middle of the night, Hatwood added that it was a rare treat for animal staff to witness the breathtaking event.

"Giraffe give birth standing up and the calf falls about six feet to the ground," she said. The fall not only breaks the umbilicus, it also gives the calf a jolt to start breathing and moving – kind of like when a doctor spanks a human baby after being born."

Animal care staff describe Tumaini as "very cautious and shy," prompting staff to remain very quiet during her labor.

Erica Sherrow, a member of the animal care team who was present for the birth, described the moment as an exhilarating experience.

"When the calf was born, his legs were awkwardly tangled over his head and we thought we might have to help get his lanky legs situated," Sherrow said. "But he figured it out himself and was standing in no time."

[The giraffe newborn is the second bundle of joy for the Species Survival Center in the past month, following the December 11 arrival of a baby Eastern bongo, a critically endangered species of antelope battling for survival in the jungles and forests of Africa.](#)

The as-yet-unnamed bongo was the first animal born as part of the groundbreaking collaboration officially known as the [Alliance for Sustainable Wildlife \(ASW\)](#). The Audubon Nature Institute/San Diego Zoo Global collaboration is akin to a modern-day ark designed to preserve species that are vulnerable in the wild and to sustain populations in human care.

The 13-year-old Tumaini (which means “hope” in Swahili), was already pregnant when she arrived in late spring from a facility in Texas that housed the center’s giraffe collection while the breeding project was under construction.

The giraffe species is considered “vulnerable” by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The population declined about 40 percent in the last three decades and the numbers are expected to continue to dwindle.

Currently, there are approximately 8,500 giraffe living in the wild.

Tumaini is part of the Species Survival Plan administered by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The plan reviews animals throughout its accredited facilities and makes recommendations about which should be moved where given their genetics and personalities and the needs of potential mates at other facilities.

The species occupied much of the African continent several decades ago, but giraffe currently dwell in open forests, dry savannahs, rainforests and plains of Kenya, Ethiopia and Somalia.

With the new addition, the Species Survival Center now is home to eight giraffe: three males and five females. The giraffe in ASW's care reside in a 46-acre, forested area; they spend most of their day foraging and looking for their favorite leaves to eat.

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