Audubon Zoo
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Howler Monkey Baby Delivered By Caesarian Section At Audubon Zoo

(New Orleans, La.) - When it comes to animal births at Audubon Zoo, the job is usually left to nature.

Recently, however, the Zoo's veterinary staff had to step in, lending a helping hand to deliver a female black howler monkey via Caesarian section

The successful January 3rd procedure was a first involving a primate for Dr. Robert MacLean, Audubon Nature Institute Senior Veterinarian, and Associate Veterinarian, Dr. James Grillo.

"Calliope" – along with mother Salsa, a 22-year-old also born at Audubon Zoo, and 12-year-old sister Nakum – have spent about two months behind the scenes in the care of animal staff. Given clean bills of health, the trio has joined father, Mijo, 17, who came to Audubon in 2003, in their habitat in the Zoo's World of Primates.

Prolonged labor with a lack of progress (or a dystocia in medical terminology) can occur in any mammal, according to MacLean, who has delivered domestic dogs, cats, and cattle by Caesarian section in the past.

"In this case, we were able to diagnose a problem with Salsa's cervix, which had a prominent scar, likely from a previous birth,'' he said. "We elected to do an emergency Cesarean, which went well.''

MacLean said risks when performing a Caesarian section are considered low to moderate when the procedure is done in time.

Potential problems, however, include infection in either mother or baby; breathing complications for the newborn; and possible rejection of the infant by the mother, which would require hand-raising by staff.

None of the issues arose with Salsa and her baby.

The howler monkey - aptly named for its cacophonous vocalizations - has faced challenges due to hunting and habitat loss across the species' native Central and South America habitat.

Audubon Zoo is an active participant in the Howler Monkey Species Survival Plan, a cooperative, inter-zoo program coordinated nationally through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Species Survival Plans help to ensure the survival of selected species in zoos and aquariums.

For that reason, Salsa and Mijo – who have now produced four offspring – are playing an important conservation role.

"Salsa is an extremely valuable animal because her genetics are so diverse,'' said Courtney Eparvier, curator of primates at Audubon Zoo. "And it's important that those genetics get passed on to future Howler Monkeys to maintain a healthy population.''

Howler Monkey Facts:

- Black Howler Monkeys are unique in that they have “prehensile” tails that act like an extra limb to maneuver through the tree canopy. The tail also allows them to hang while using their arms to gather leaves to eat.
- The pad on their tails has a unique “tail print” just like a fingerprint that is individual to each animal.
- Howler Monkeys like to spend time grooming each other to maintain the social structure and relationships within the groups.
- Their howls can be heard through the dense South American forest from up to three miles away.
- The vocalizations make the Howler Monkey the loudest New World animal (animals native to the Western Hemisphere) living on land.
- Males use their howls to defend and protect territory.
- Although howls take place at various times throughout the day, the morning and the evening is prime time for sending the message to others that the area is already occupied.

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