

# News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
April 23, 2008

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## FIRST EVER BIRTH OF SOMALI WILD ASS AT SAINT LOUIS ZOO

*This beautiful African wild ass is extremely rare in zoos and in the wild*

A frisky foal frolics outdoors (weather permitting) with her mother, Fataki, a Somali wild ass which gave birth to the little female on April 10 at the Saint Louis Zoo. This is a first birth for mother Fataki, the sire Abai, and the Saint Louis Zoo.



The Somali wild ass is a critically endangered wild member of the horse family, found in small numbers in desert areas of Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Probably less than 1,000 exist in northeastern Africa.

There are currently only 27 Somali wild asses in North America, with seven at the Saint Louis Zoo. Only one other zoo in North America has bred this species. This little foal is an important addition.

She has the beautiful markings of her mother – gray body, white belly and horizontal black stripes on her legs, similar to zebras.

Fataki, along with her half-sisters Liberty and Tukia, arrived at the Saint Louis Zoo in 2005. They were born at the San Diego Wild Animal Park in 2004. Their mate, Abai, was born at the Basel Zoo in Switzerland in 2003.

The Zoo is collaborating with Washington University to study the behavior of the Somali wild ass foal along with her mother for mother/infant behavior.

The Somali wild ass is the smallest of all wild horses, asses and zebras. It stands about four feet tall at the shoulder and weighs about 600 pounds. It has long, narrow hooves -- the narrowest of any wild horse. This unique design allows the animals to be swift and surefooted in their rough, rocky habitat.

They can go without water longer than other wild asses, but they still need to drink at least once every two or three days. They have large ears, which help them hear and keep cool. They have loud voices to keep in touch over broad expanses of desert.

The Saint Louis Zoo and its WildCare Institute Center for Conservation in the Horn of Africa has supported field research and conservation programs to study and preserve the rare African wild ass and its arid habitat. In partnership with other conservation organizations,

Somali wild ass  
add one

the Zoo has supported programs in both Ethiopia and Eritrea.

African wild asses face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild, for a number of reasons. For one thing, some local people have been known to hunt the asses for food and for use in traditional medicine. (Some native people believe the animals' fat is an effective treatment for tuberculosis.) Hunting has taken a greater toll in recent years, as political unrest in the area has allowed better access to automatic weapons.

Other problems they face are brought about by increasing human populations and the expansion of agriculture. More and more, wild asses are competing with domestic livestock for limited grazing grounds and water sources. And as the wild and domestic animals come into contact, there is more and more interbreeding – another serious threat to wild asses.

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