

New baby in the Pygmy Hippo family

On May 6th 2011, a male Pygmy Hippo (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis*) was born in Bratislava Zoo. The calf is healthy and viable.



The father of the offspring is Paul, born on May 17th 2007 in Berlin Zoo. Paul was transported to our Zoo when he was one year old. At this time he was still very young for mating and therefore we had to wait until he reached sexual maturity. In nature, males begin to mate between seven to eight years old but animals tend to mature sooner in Zoos - between two and a half to four years old. At first, Paul became acquainted with our two females through the fence. Paul has got cheerful character, he likes to play with its keepers "hide and seek" and he loves doing "propeller" in the pool - he turns on its side and begins to twist around in one place.

The Mother of the youngster is our female Dina, born on December 22nd 1982 in Dvůr Králové Zoo. She came to our Zoo in 1984. Dina is an experienced mother; she gave birth to seven offspring of which five were females and two males. All calves were bred naturally. Daughter Dimba, born on April 22nd 2006, remained in our Zoo. Since Dimba is still young, she has not been allowed to mate but in the future we do count with her as the next breeding female. When young, Dina was headstrong and regularly refused to cooperate with keepers. Today, however, she is much calmer and willing to cooperate. Dimba is of similar nature as her mother - she is quite headstrong, moody but also playful. She likes to play "orca" - she leans against the pool wall with her front hooves, then bounces back and propels herself above the water level belly up. Our Pygmy Hippos often play in the pool with plastic balls and tires.

Paul and Dina were successfully let together for the first time into one enclosure last year during the female's oestrus. Neither of them minded the age difference and mating was successful. The pregnancy and birth were also



trouble free. The birth took place on May 6th 2011 between 10:50 am and 11:25 am. The offspring has been often visiting mother's milk bar and is putting on weight rapidly. The little male was weighed for the first time on May 12th, six days after being born, weighing 9.42 kilos.

On May 18th 2011 weighing was repeated - the young Pygmy Hippo already weighed 11.50 kilos.

Basic facts about Pygmy Hippos

Pygmy Hippo (*Hexaprotodon liberiensis*) belongs to even-toed ungulates, inhabiting tropical rain forests and swamp forests of western Africa. It leads solitary life, meaning that males and females meet only at the time of mating. Female gives birth to one, exceptionally two cubs after 187 to 214 days of pregnancy. Only the female cares for her young. Birth weight of the cubs is about 5 - 7 kg. Female breastfeeds her young for about 6 to 8 months, while the offspring begins to take in solid food between 2 and 4 months. The average life expectancy of Pygmy Hippo is more than 40 years. Pygmy Hippos in the wild feed on aquatic plants, fresh leaves of young trees and shrubs, fruit, herbs and grasses. Their enemy is primarily human, but young animals can fall prey to leopards.

Interesting facts about Pygmy Hippos

- Pygmy Hippo is significantly smaller than its cousin, the Common Hippopotamus, and is not as dependent on life in water as is his more robust relative.
- Pygmy Hippo calves can not swim immediately after being born and must be taught by its mother. "Swimming course" takes several weeks and the young start to swim between 4 to 6 weeks of age.
- Pygmy Hippos are almost hairless animals; their skin does not possess scent and sweat glands. However, they do contain sebaceous glands which continually exclude white alkaline secretion protecting the skin from losing water, as well as from sun rays, and also has a disinfecting function (when injured).

- Pygmy Hippos can be often seen with their mouths open - this way they warn their enemy by showing dangerous teeth, trying to deter predators.
- Mating can occur on dry land but also in water.
- Pygmy Hippo has four chambered stomach.
- They mark their territory with urine and faeces. Droppings are spread to a considerable distance by fast flicking of short tail which measures approximately 28 cm.
- Nostrils are laid lower than the eyes and ears and are not arched over the skull. The back is curved downward towards the head - this way it is easier to wade through the thickets.
- They cool down in water or mud but frequently bask in the sun.
- There are muscle latches in their ears and nose = adaptation to life in water.
- The jaws are connected at the back; hence they are able to open their mouth as widely.

Threats and protection of Pygmy Hippos

Due to the devastation of rain forests, hunting, intensive agriculture, and persistent wars, the number of Pygmy Hippos has been steadily decreasing. Pygmy Hippos are gradually losing their home. At the beginning of the early 90's of the 20th century, there were only about 2000 to 3000 individuals in the wild. At present, the exact number is unknown but the numbers are estimated around 400 individuals.

In 1992, the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria established European Endangered Species Programme for this endangered species coordinated by Basel Zoo (Switzerland). The Pygmy Hippo is included in *Appendix II* of the Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and in *Annex B* of Council Regulation (EC) no. 338/97 on the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade therein. In the International Red List of Threatened Species IUCN the Pygmy Hippo species is marked as EN = endangered species.





