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Tiger cubs born at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium *Births advance critically endangered Sumatran tiger population*



Two endangered Sumatran tiger cubs were born at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium in Tacoma, Wash. on May 25.

Tacoma, Wash. – Jaya, a 6-year-old Sumatran tiger at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, is caring for her first litter of two tiger cubs today after giving birth on Tuesday, May 25.

Staff have only seen the cubs on video surveillance from inside the tigers' behind-the-scenes nest box, but they say Jaya and the two cubs appear healthy. A third cub was born with the litter, but died during birth.

“We’re heartbroken to lose one of them so early, but the rest of the group seems strong and active,” said staff biologist Andy Goldfarb. “We’ll keep a close eye on them as Jaya learns her role as a first-time mom. But right now, we believe the remaining cubs will

thrive.”

Tiger cubs, generally about 2 lbs. at birth, rely entirely on their mother for the first three months. The cubs at Point Defiance Zoo will live behind the scenes for several weeks, and visitors will have the chance to see them through a video monitor set up in the zoo’s Asian Forest Sanctuary.

“They’re adorable!” Goldfarb said. “Seeing them on camera in these first few weeks is a real treat.”

At about eight weeks old, tiger cubs are generally ready to leave the den with their mother, and staff will attempt to get the cubs into their exhibit around that time.

“We want people to see them as soon as they’re ready,” Goldfarb said. “They’re sure to be crowd pleasers, but they’ll also be educational ambassadors, bringing a note of optimism about their species directly to Northwest families.”

The two new cubs bring the total number of Sumatran tigers in North American zoos to 74. With fewer than 500 left worldwide, zoo staff stress the significance of the cubs to the species as a whole.

“Sumatran tigers are among the world’s most critically endangered species,” said general curator Karen Goodrowe Beck. “These cubs not only add to the overall population, but they also provide invaluable genetic diversity to the breeding program.”

Point Defiance Zoo participates in the Sumatran tiger Species Survival Plan (SSP®), coordinated by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. The SSP manages the Sumatran population in North America.

The SSP made the recommendation that Point Defiance Zoo breed Jaya with the cubs’ father, Bali, last summer. At the same time staff confirmed Jaya’s pregnancy last month, Bali was diagnosed with cancer. A test on May 18 showed positive progress from Bali’s chemotherapy treatment by zoo veterinarians.

“He’s not cured, but his life may be prolonged, thanks to the dedication and skill of our veterinary team and collaborating veterinary oncologist,” said Goodrowe Beck. “Visitors will be able to see him on exhibit while his cubs grow with mom behind the scenes.”

The zoo will invite the public to vote on the cubs’ names once they are safely settled and staff are able to determine their sexes.

For more information about Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, visit www.pdza.org or call 253-591-5337.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo & aquarium, is located in Tacoma’s beautiful Point Defiance Park, 5400 North Pearl Street. Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).