

Baby for blind monkey mum

Photos by Dave Rolfe

Keepers are delighted to announce the arrival of a new baby for Tolkien, a Black and Gold Howler monkey at Port Lympne Wild Animal Park.

This birth is particularly remarkable because nine year old Tolkien is near-blind, having had cataracts from a very early age. Although the cataracts were removed by specialists, vets were unable to find lenses small enough for her tiny eyes and, as a result, Tolkien is unable to focus.

Despite only having partial vision Tolkien lives a full and active life and is a good mother, perfectly able to tend to the needs of her infant who is still clinging to her belly, entirely dependant on her. The as-yet-unnamed infant is believed to be a male and has been welcomed by his brother Gimli, Tolkien's last infant, who was born in October of last year. Gimli is now confidently exploring and playing in the family's enclosure, which is also home to his older brother Merry and father Clyde.

Head of Primates at Port Lympne, Simon Jeffery, commented:

'We are absolutely delighted to welcome this new arrival who is doing really well. Although he is currently golden like his mum, he will turn black like all males in his species at around two years of age. Tolkien is very friendly and confident so she is really popular with visitors and you have a great chance of spotting the new infant when you visit the park'

Black and Gold Howler monkeys are one of the largest South American monkeys and are found across Southern Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina. This leaf eating species has a prehensile tail that is known to have its own finger print.

The howler monkey gets its name from its resonating cry which can be audible from distances of up to 2km away. The Black and Gold Howler monkey has an enlarged and highly specialized voice box that produces these distinctive howls, grunts, roars and barks. Howling sessions, usually involving the entire group, can be heard particularly in the early morning and the Howlers at Port Lympe are no exception, with their morning call frequently heard echoing across the park.

While populations of this adaptable primate are still relatively robust, the species is in decline due to forest destruction and the bush meat trade.

Notes to Editors:

Port Lympe currently house 20 Black and Gold Howler Monkeys, including this latest arrival.

The Aspinall Foundation's Port Lympe and Howletts Wild Animal Parks in Kent were set up by the late John Aspinall to be centres of excellence for animal husbandry within which to protect and breed threatened species, with a view to returning them to the wild wherever possible.

The Aspinall Foundation, which manages the parks, is today a world leading conservation charity dedicated to keeping John Aspinall's innovative conservation ethos alive- leading the way through education, captive breeding and reintroduction. The Aspinall Foundation has projects both in the UK and overseas, including Java, Madagascar, Congo and The Gabon. Working in conjunction with the parks, The Aspinall Foundation has so far returned to the wild Przewalski's horses, black rhino, Cape buffalo, pythons and gorillas.

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