Santa Barbara Zoo Mourns Loss of Newborn Giraffe Calf

(07/22/2020) Santa Barbara, CA -- The Santa Barbara Zoo is deeply saddened to share the loss of a female Masai giraffe calf born on Tuesday, July 21. After complications at birth and continued monitoring and intervention, the Zoo’s animal care team assessed that the calf would not survive, and the decision for humane euthanization was made. At this time, the details of the calf’s health complications are unknown; however, more information will be available in several weeks after a necropsy (animal autopsy) is conducted and a pathology report is received. At this time, the mother giraffe Audrey is in stable condition and continues to be monitored by the Zoo’s animal care experts.

“We share this news with a very heavy heart,” shared Dr. Julie Barnes, the Zoo’s Vice President of Animal Care and Health. “Audrey began to show signs of labor around 6:00 p.m. on July 21, and the calf was born at approximately 7:45 p.m. Immediately following the delivery, the calf was not showing normal behavior, appeared weak and was unable to stand on its own. The calf exhibited several potential congenital abnormalities that the animal care team suspects contributed to the calf’s lack of responsiveness and inability to get up. It is also possible that the calf may have experienced some sort of fetal distress in-utero or during birth. Our devoted animal care team cared for the calf and her mother, Audrey, around the clock after the birth, and despite tremendous efforts, there was no improvement in the calf’s condition. Taking into consideration the calf’s very poor prognosis for survival, we made the decision to euthanize her this morning. A necropsy will be performed at the UC Davis California Animal Health and Food Safety Laboratory in San Bernardino.”

While the Zoo has had many successful giraffe births over the years, many animals, including giraffes, face the risk of pregnancy and birth complications—both in their native environment and in human care.

“The loss of any animal is heartbreaking for our entire Zoo family, and we are grieving this loss,” shared Rich Block, Santa Barbara Zoo President & CEO. “Despite the unfortunate outcome, I’m proud of the Zoo team for the great measures they took to try to save Audrey’s calf. We are grateful for the support of our community, as well as from our professional conservation community, as we continue our commitment to working to protect the future of wildlife.”

The Santa Barbara Zoo plays a significant role in the conservation efforts of the Masai giraffe, with eight giraffes born at the Zoo since 2013, all sired by father Michael (age 13). Michael is the most genetically important male Masai giraffe in the United States, as he has no other relatives besides his offspring. He was brought to the Zoo from Canada in December 2011 and of his eight calves, seven have been moved to other accredited zoos as part of a collaborative Species Survival Plan, which manages the population
to ensure that genetic diversity is maintained so that the population thrives. With its mission to preserve and conserve the natural world, the Zoo remains committed to engaging the public to help increase awareness about these species and the actions we can all take to help protect them. Twiga, born in March, continues to do well.

**About Masai Giraffes**

In 2019, the International Union for Conservation of Nature announced Masai giraffes are endangered. There are an estimated 37,000 Masai giraffes in Kenya and Tanzania, having fallen by nearly 50% over the past three decades. Africa’s overall giraffe population has decreased by up to 40% in that same timeframe. They are at risk due to poaching and habitat loss and degradation. Giraffes are the tallest land mammal, and the Masai is the largest subspecies, growing up to 17 feet tall and weighing up to 2,700 pounds.

**About the Santa Barbara Zoo**

The Santa Barbara Zoo is now open with limited capacity. During the initial reopening phase, online reservations for tickets are required for all guests, including SB Zoo Members, available at [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org). Known as one of the world’s most beautiful zoos, the Santa Barbara Zoo is located on 30 acres of botanic gardens and is home to more than 500 individual animals in open, naturalistic habitats. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), representing the highest level of animal care, and participates in AZA endangered species programs for Masai giraffe, California condor, island fox, and Western lowland gorilla, among others. As a private 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, the Santa Barbara Zoo depends on community support, not tax dollars, for operations and improvements. Visit [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org).

###