

Rare Colobus monkey celebrates first birthday at Oregon Zoo

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

PORTLAND, Ore. - The Oregon Zoo is celebrating the first birthday of Delu, its baby colobus monkey, on Friday, Dec. 21, and zookeepers are throwing her a party. Visitors can help celebrate the occasion, while learning more about the issues that threaten this rare monkey in the wild. The birthday party and keeper chat are slated for 10:30 a.m.

Delu as a newborn baby with mother. The Oregon Zoo is celebrating the 1st birthday of the rare monkey on Dec. 21 at 10:30 a.m. Photo by Michael Durham. © Oregon Zoo

Delu now as a toddler. Photo by Michael Durham. © Oregon Zoo

Delu has done extremely well her first year of life, according to Africa Keeper Liz Zimmerman, and she has achieved several milestones. The young colobus has weaned herself from her mother's milk and has lost her pure-white baby coloring. She is now a striking black-and-white, similar to her parents.

Zimmerman describes Delu as very independent: "She spends her days wrestling with her parents, Mali and Kiku, or 'Aunt' Zoe, while exploring her habitat. She also grooms the adults, which is an especially important behavior for these social animals, because it helps strengthen their relationships."

Delu is the fourth baby -- and first female -- for mother Mali, 11, and her mate, Kiku, 16.

"We chose the name Delu, because it is a Hausa word for 'the only daughter,'" says Zimmerman. Hausa is the native language for the majority of Nigeria, and is prominent across West Africa and in Ghana.

The colobus monkey is a threatened species and continues to lose habitat as humans cut down forestlands. The rare monkey is also hunted and killed -- for the bushmeat trade and for its beautiful fur -- or captured and sold as part of the illegal pet trade. Because the entire troop will try to protect an infant colobus monkey, poachers will often kill the adults to capture the infants. One solution is to support organizations and groups working to solve the bushmeat crisis. For more information, visit www.bushmeat.org.

Colobus troops are highly social, and mutual handling of infants by members other than the mother is believed to maintain the cohesiveness of the group. The monkeys usually live in a family setting, with one male, three to four females, juveniles and infants. Troops live in the forests and grasslands of central and eastern Africa. In the wild, their diet consists of flowers, fruit and leaves, but in the zoo they eat mostly vegetables. The monkey, nicknamed the "Messenger of the Gods," can usually be found climbing high up into the trees and facing the sun at dawn and dusk. Zimmerman says Delu seems keenly interested in becoming friends with her exhibit mate, a young female swamp monkey named Bleu.

"Delu will run up to Bleu, touching her softly then quickly darting away - kind of like tag, you're it!" explains Zimmerman. "Unfortunately, Bleu doesn't appear to be interested in an interspecies friendship."

The monkeys are known for their black body and white shoulders, back and beard. Unlike most primates, the colobus do not have thumbs; this is most likely an adaptation for moving through the trees quickly. The monkeys stand about 18 to 27 inches high and weigh about 12 to 32 pounds.

To view video of the rare colobus baby, please visit <http://www.oregonzoo.org/VideoArchive/DeluTurnsOne.htm>

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