



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: July 27, 2002

Note: a press conference will be held this evening at 8 pm in the Zambezi Room of the Zoo's Museum of Science Building. Please contact Andi if you plan on attending.

Elephant Baby Does Not Survive

Toledo, OH - The Toledo Zoo regrets to announce that Rafiki, a 20-year-old African elephant, gave birth late this afternoon to a large stillborn, male, calf weighing approximately 350 pounds. Elephant calves usually average 200-250 pounds at birth. According to Dr. Dennis Schmitt, Elephant Reproductive Specialist, it appeared that the calf did not clear the birth canal due to its size. A necropsy is being conducted to confirm the cause of death.

Routine blood analysis indicated that Rafiki's progesterone (a hormone that maintains pregnancy) level had been decreasing which is one of several signals that precedes active labor. As planned, The Toledo Zoo notified their two elephant program consultants, Dr. Dennis Schmitt and Alan Roocroft, who had both traveled to the Zoo yesterday in anticipation of the pending birth.

Ultrasound examinations last night and this morning both showed the same results, that the fetus was not present in the birth canal. A third ultrasound was scheduled for this evening. Rafiki's behavior did not indicate any signs of labor and she actually spent time sleeping comfortably this afternoon. Labor usually takes several hours and everyone on the elephant team was surprised at how rapidly the birth progressed. According to Dr. Schmitt, "Based on my experience, this was the fastest labor and largest African elephant calf by far."

Although elephant pregnancies are extremely risky with additional risk for a first-time pregnancy, Rafiki is in excellent condition and the calf also appeared to have been in good condition. The animal care staff will continue to monitor Rafiki, who may experience some edema (swelling) in her reproductive tract.

Toledo Zoo animal care staff have spent months preparing for every contingency and conferring with dozens of other zoo professionals who had experience with elephant births. In addition, the Zoo had been continuously monitoring the elephant 24-hours a day since July 15. "We are extremely sad that we were unable to prevent this unhappy event" said Bill Dennler, Executive Director.

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