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**Contact:** Christopher Mims, Director of Marketing and Public Relations

601-352-2599

## Spring Births at the Jackson Zoo

### Dama Gazelle

The Jackson Zoo is pleased to announce the birth of Gumby born last week to parents Valkyrie and Fireball. The baby Dama Gazelle is fitting in nicely in African Savannah exhibit. This is Valkyrie's third offspring.

The Dama Gazelle weighs up to 190 lbs. and stands up to 42" tall at the shoulder. It is found in the Sahara Desert and the Sahel. While avoiding mountains and dunes, it favors stony plains and plateaus, inter-dunal depressions with shallow sandy soils, and undulating foothills and steppes. The Dama Gazelle is highly drought resistant - most of its water is obtained from its plant food. It browses on various desert shrubs and acacias, and it eats rough desert grasses in times of drought. Dama Gazelle s move into the Sahara in the wet season and out of the Sahara (both to the north and to the south) to moister parts of their range for the dry season. The social organization of Dama Gazelle s is greatly affected by the seasons. Herds typically spend the dry season in the Sahel where they occur singly or in mixed groups of 10 - 15. With the onset of the rainy season, they migrate into the desert and can be found in aggregations which, in the past, included up to several hundred males and females.



**Gumby rests near a log in her exhibit.**

The Dama Gazelle was once one of the most numerous and widespread of Saharan gazelles from Morocco, Senegal and Mauritania eastward to the Sudan. It experienced a significant decline during the 1950's through the 1970's. By the early 1980's it still occurred over the same general range but was extinct in most areas within its range, though perhaps still locally abundant in some places. It is now thought to occur in the wild only in Algeria, Chad, Mali, Niger, and Sudan. It has been re-introduced in Senegal.

Formerly, hunting was the major cause of the decline of the Dama Gazelle, especially after motorized hunting with modern firearms began. Recently, the Dama Gazelle's habitat has become increasingly drier and less suitable, due to long-term climate change as well as to overgrazing by livestock and loss of tree cover due to clearing by man. Furthermore, the increasing presence of livestock has driven the gazelle away from the pastures where it formerly obtained both food and water. Civil unrest in the area where it resides has also contributed to its decline.

The Jackson Zoo cooperates in the Species Survival Plan (SSP) for Dama Gazelles and 22 other animal species. The SSP is a cooperative breeding and conservation program overseen by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA). AZA members agree to manage and exchange animals in the best interests of the species. Currently, 107 SSPs covering 161 individual species are administered by the AZA.

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**Black-tailed Prairie Dogs**

Several black-tailed prairie dog pups emerged from their dens last week in the Discovery Zoo. Some visitors say they've observed six and some say seven. It typically takes 4-6 weeks for the pups to emerge after birth.

Prairie dogs occur only in North America. They are rodents within the squirrel family and include five species – the black-tailed prairie dog, the white-tailed prairie dog, the Gunnison prairie dog, the Utah prairie dog, and the Mexican prairie dog. The Utah and Mexican prairie dogs are currently listed under the Endangered Species Act as threatened and endangered respectively. Generally, the black-tailed prairie dog occurs east of the other four species in more mesic habitat.



**Three pups play just outside the den.**

Prairie dogs are small, stout ground squirrels. The total length of an adult black-tailed prairie dog is approximately 14-17 inches. The weight of an individual ranges from 1 to 3 pounds. Individual appearances within the species vary in mixed colors of brown, black, gray, and white. The black-tipped tail is characteristic. Black-tailed Prairie Dogs are diurnal, burrowing animals. They do not hibernate as do white-tailed, Gunnison, and Utah prairie dogs.

The historic range of the black-tailed prairie dog included portions of 11 States, Canada, and Mexico. Today it occurs from extreme south-central Canada to northeastern Mexico and from approximate the 98th meridian west to the Rocky Mountains. The species is currently present in 10 States including Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming.

The black-tailed prairie dog experienced a precipitous decline from its historic numbers, but has been stable to increasing over the past 40 years.

**Black-necked Swans**

The Zoo's Black-neck Swan has laid 4 eggs, and if all goes well, they should hatch before the end of April. The Black-necked Swan is a large South American water bird. The body plumage is white with a black neck, head and grayish bill. It has a red knob near the base of the bill and white stripe behind eye. Both sexes are similar, with a slightly smaller female. The cygnet has a light grey plumage with black bill and feet.



**Black-necks Swan eggs**

It is found in freshwater marshes, lagoon and lake shores in the southern South America. The Black-necked Swan breeds in Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego and on the Falkland Islands.

In winter, this species migrates northwards to Paraguay and southern Brazil.

The Laguna Blanca National Park in Argentina is a protected home of this swan.

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The wetlands created by the Great Chilean Earthquake like Cruces River has become important population centers for the Black-necked Swan.

Also, unlike most wildfowl, both parents regularly carry the cygnets on their backs. The female lays four to six eggs in a nest of vegetation mound. The diet consists mainly of vegetation, insects and fish spawn.

The Black-necked Swan is not endangered.

The Jackson Zoo was recently named **Travel Attraction of the Year** by the Mississippi Tourism Association and is

dedicated to its mission, to provide visitors with a quality recreational and educational environment dedicated to wildlife care and conservation. The new 4-plus acre Wilderness Mississippi was opened in 2006, and last year also marked the unveiling of a new entryway off Capitol Street and renovation of the orangutan exhibit. This year construction of a state-of-the-art Mississippi Discovery Center will begin. The Zoo also plans to make improvements to the elephant, tiger and leopard exhibits.

The Jackson Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). The AZA is America's leading accrediting organization that sets rigorous, professional standards for zoos and aquariums. The AZA is building North America's largest wildlife conservation movement by engaging and inspiring the 143 million annual visitors to its member institutions and their communities to care about and take action to help protect wildlife.

The Jackson Zoo is located at 2918 West Capitol Street and is open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. For more information about the Jackson Zoo, call (601) 352-2581 or visit [www.jacksonzoo.org](http://www.jacksonzoo.org).



**Adult Black-necked swan**

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