

Paignton UNITED KINGDOMSOURCE
NEIL BEMMENT

It was not the first **black rhino** (*Diceros bicornis*) to be born in captivity and it probably will not be the last, but the arrival of 'Zuri' (meaning 'Beautiful' in Kiswahili) on 5 March 2007 was not only Paignton Zoo's first ever rhino birth, it was also the first black rhino birth to be witnessed live on the internet.

'Sita', a 12-year-old female arrived, courtesy of Berlin Zoo, in September 2003. She was joined the following January by a twenty-year-old, four times proven breeder 'Kingo', from Port Lympne Wild Animal Park, at the recommendation of the Black rhino EEP. Matings took place soon after Kingo's arrival, but no pregnancy resulted then. It was another 18 months before it was confirmed that Sita was pregnant and due to give birth for the first time in early 2007.

The zoo was approached by the BBC with a view to following the last couple of months of the pregnancy as part of an 'Inside Out' documentary via Webcam. Webcams can be invaluable for the remote monitoring of animals in a whole host of situations, however, 'live' webcams can be a double-edged sword. They are undeniably popular with internet enthusiasts and are by definition good publicity for all concerned, but they can open up opportunities for criticism if staff should not react appropriately when things do not go according to plan. It was therefore with some trepidation, and several provisos later, that the zoo agreed to a 24/7 coverage on the 'world wide web'.

Sita duly gave birth to her female calf, in the breech position, just after 8.00 pm. A few heart stopping moments waiting for the calf to take her first breath were followed by four nail-biting hours of watching her attempt to stand. At midnight the decision was made to intervene. Sita was



PHOTO PAIGNTON ZOO

separated and after a quick massage of Zuri's hindquarters and her relocation to a deeper area of the straw bed, mother and calf were reunited. The keepers had smeared Zuri with remains of the afterbirth to help disguise any human scent, albeit Sita did not seem to be unduly concerned about being kept apart from her new arrival while she ate some browse. Zuri was observed suckling within a couple of hours.

Over the next five days there were 235,123 requests for the video clips of the birth and more than 629,000 hits on the Paignton Zoo rhino house website after mid-December, making it the most popular BBC web-link ever. Easter attendances went up fourfold, but then other UK institutions also had very good attendances over that period. However, the rhino birth obviously was a factor as the zoo had queues of visitors wanting to get into the rhino house. As one of the rarest mammals on the planet Paignton Zoo hopes that Zuri will play her part in conserving her species in years to come.

Antwerp BELGIUMSOURCE
SANDER HOFMAN

Common hippo (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) 'Hermien' gave birth to a healthy calf on 10 May 2007. This is the first successful hippo birth in 21 years in Antwerp Zoo.

Antwerp Zoo, founded in 1843, has a long history of holding hippos. Data on the species go back to the 19th century with a total of 19 births throughout time. The zoo has housed a pair (1:1) in recent years. Hermien came from Zürich Zoo in 1981, at an age of eight months, and successfully raised two offspring in 1985 and 1986 while paired with a wild born bull. When he died in 1994 at the age of 44, Hermien spent several years alone. After the renovation of the exhibit in 2002, Hermien was introduced to the 37-year-old bull 'Heini', who came from Zoo Dvur Kralove

The newly formed pair was not very successful initially. Hermien had a premature birth in 2003 and a calf born in 2005 is suspected to have drowned in the outside basin. A protocol was formulated to have better control over circumstances. When the cow began excreting milk, the water of the inside basin would be lowered to prevent the newborn from drowning and the



PHOTO ANTWERP ZOO

pair would be separated. When Hermien started excreting milk in 2006, the protocol was put into practice, but sadly no young was born. This year, just about when one started to think it would never happen again, the protocol had to be followed again, as Hermien gave birth to a healthy calf. It was decided to name the calf 'Imani', which means 'Hope' in Kiswahili.