

Australia welcomes its first new-born elephant

July 4 2009



This Sydney Taronga Zoo handout image shows a CCTV frame of a new-born elephant calf (bottom centre) with its mother 'Thong Dee' at the zoo in the early hours of the morning. The male calf is the first to be born in Australia and was delivered after a three hour labour.

Australia has welcomed the first elephant ever born in the country with the arrival of a 100-kilogram (220.4-pound) male calf at a Sydney zoo, according to keepers.

The calf, yet to be named, was born at the harbourside Taronga [Zoo](#) just after 3am (1700 GMT) to a 12-year-old Asian elephant named Thong Dee, the zoo's director Guy Cooper said.

"(Staff) were with her throughout the night and have been sleeping at the

barn to support Thong Dee the instant she went into labour," Cooper said.

"She was quite magnificent and her success is a tribute to the incredibly hard work our elephant keepers have done to support our elephants as a true family unit," he added.

Thong Dee, formerly a Bangkok street elephant, was surprised by the birth, and needed to be calmed before she could be introduced to her son, said Cooper, adding that the calf was conceived naturally with the bull Gung under the zoo's breeding programme.

She greeted her baby by touching his trunk and he soon tried to suckle, which Cooper said was a good sign.

"The early signs are good and we will monitor mother and calf very closely, providing every possible support," he said.

As few as 33,000 endangered Asian [elephants](#) are thought to remain in Asia, and only half of all 22-month pregnancies in the wild succeed.

The zoo's Asian elephant matriarch, 16-year-old Porntip, is due to give birth early next year to her first calf conceived by artificial insemination, with sperm from Melbourne Zoo's bull Bong Su.

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