



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
2 December 2011

**CONTACT:** Jane Ballentine  
O: 443/552-5278  
C: 301/332-1742

**MARYLAND ZOO WELCOMES NEWBORN SIFAKA BABY**

*-Second sifaka born at the Zoo in 2011—Family to go on exhibit Sunday, December 4-*

**BALTIMORE, MD** -- The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is pleased to announce the birth of a second male Coquerel's sifaka (CAHK-ker-rells she-FAHK) baby born on Saturday, November 12, 2011, almost nine months to the day that his older brother Otto was born. "We observed changes in Anastasia which made us suspect she might be pregnant, but we were not sure if it was just wishful thinking on our parts so soon after Otto's birth," stated Mike McClure, general curator. "We are very pleased to see that the baby is healthy, and to observe that the sifaka family is bonding quite nicely in a quiet off exhibit area for now."

The Maryland Zoo's sifaka pair, Anastasia, age 7 and Gratian, age 9 are the parents of baby Nero, born early in the morning of November 12. His birth weight was 94 grams, which falls in the average birth weight range of 85-115 grams. "This baby weighs just a little less than his brother Otto did at birth, but still about the weight of a deck of cards," said Meredith Wagoner, mammal collection and conservation manager at the Zoo. "Sifaka are born with sparse hair and resemble tiny gremlins, however their white hair soon grows in and they begin to resemble their parents."

Newborn sifaka ride on their mother's belly for the first month, then graduate to riding on her back. By two months of age they have learned the basics of leaping, and claim the treetops as their own by about six months of age. Young reach adult size at one year old. Coquerel's sifaka reach sexual maturity at age 3 and when they do give birth, the litter size is always one. "Infant mortality is pretty high - about one-third of babies die in the first year," said Wagoner, "Even though we know Anastasia was a good mother to Otto, we still need to monitor her and the new baby closely to watch for any signs of weakness. Fortunately, Anastasia is again proving to be a very attentive mother. The baby is eating well and showing appropriate signs of growth." Gratian has also taken an interest in the baby, although sifaka fathers do not closely assist with the childrearing. "In the wild, sifaka live in social groups of three to ten animals, with a diversity of gender and age," continued Wagoner, "So, we anticipate keeping this family group together for quite some time."

Coquerel's sifaka (*Propithecus coquereli*) are lemurs; native only to the island of Madagascar off the southeastern coast of Africa. Coquerel's sifaka spend most of their lives in the treetops in two protected areas in the sparse dry, deciduous forests on the northwestern side of the island. As with many species of lemur, Coquerel's sifaka are endangered -- habitat loss due to deforestation is the leading threat to sifaka, as is the case with many species of lemur. Sifaka have a unique brown and white coloration,

-- more --

and are distinguished from other lemurs by the way that they move. They maintain a very upright posture and, using only their back legs, leap through the treetops. They can easily leap more than 20 feet in a single bound. On the ground, they spring sideways off their back feet to cover distance.

Nero's birth is the result of a recommendation from the Sifaka Species Survival Plan (SSP) coordinated by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). SSPs provide breeding recommendations to maximize genetic diversity, with the goal of ensuring the long-term survival of the captive population and the health of individual animals. There are only eight accredited zoos that house the 50 Coquerel's sifaka in the U.S. and this tiny baby represents 2% of the total captive population in the country.

Zoo visitors will be able to see Nero, big brother Otto and their parents in the sifaka exhibit inside the Chimpanzee Forest beginning Sunday, December 4, 2011. "Otto is almost as large as Anastasia and Gratian, but you can still tell he is a youngster. Baby Nero is clinging to Mom's belly and blends in with her fur, but he will become easier to see as he grows," concluded Wagoner. "Folks will still have to look high in the trees, but it's worth the effort to catch a glimpse of new addition to the sifaka family."

#### **About The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore**

Founded in 1876, The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is the third oldest zoo in the United States and is internationally known for its contributions in conservation and research. More than 1,500 animals are represented in the Zoo's varied natural habitat exhibits in areas such as Polar Bear Watch, the Maryland Wilderness, African Journey and the award-winning Children's Zoo. Situated in Druid Hill Park near downtown Baltimore, the Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. For more information, visit [www.marylandzoo.org](http://www.marylandzoo.org).

###