

## Greenville Zoo reveals gender of baby giraffe

By Andrew Moore - Feb 2, 2018

The Greenville Zoo on Friday revealed the gender of its new baby giraffe: It's a girl!

Autumn, an 11-year-old Masai giraffe, gave birth to a female calf on Wednesday, Jan. 31. The birth was watched around the world via [EarthCam](#), a popular streaming service that partnered with the Greenville Zoo in 2012 and installed cameras at the giraffe exhibit.

Keith Gilchrist, the zoo's general curator, said the unnamed calf already stands at 6 feet, 2 inches and weighs around 157 pounds. She is the first calf born at the zoo to Autumn and Miles, an 8-year-old giraffe who was born at the Houston Zoo and transferred to Greenville in 2016.

Like a majority of the animals at the Greenville Zoo, Autumn and Miles are part of a cooperative breeding program called the Species Survival Program.

The purpose of the program is to monitor captive populations and make breeding recommendations based on genetic variability and spaces available at other institutions to ensure a long-term viable population without removing animals from the wild.

The zoo's veterinary staff first discovered Autumn's pregnancy through hormone analysis in early December and then conducted regular checkups, according to Gilchrist. Autumn carried the calf for about 14 months before giving birth.

On Wednesday, Autumn went into labor at 10:15 a.m. and delivered her calf shortly after 11:30 a.m. "The entire birthing process is a bit nerve-racking, because there are a lot of things that can go wrong," said Gilchrist. "But I guess that's why they call it the miracle of birth."

Giraffes give birth while standing up, causing the calf to fall about six feet to the ground, according to Gilchrist. The fall breaks the umbilical cord and encourages the calf to take its first breaths. Once the calf is on the ground, the mother cleans it off. The calf then takes its first steps in just a few minutes and is able to run by the end of its first day on Earth.

Luckily, Autumn's calf survived the plunge and took her first steps shortly after birth, according to Nikolay Kapustin, deputy administrator and veterinarian at the Greenville Zoo.

On Thursday, Feb. 1, the zoo's animal care staff conducted a routine neonatal exam and checked the calf's blood to determine her overall health and whether she is receiving important antibodies from Autumn's milk. All tests came back normal. Now the zoo's staff is monitoring the calf to ensure that she meets important benchmarks, such as nursing successfully.

"We're all pleased to see the calf making great progress from the time of birth onward. She has been nursing very well, and Autumn is being very attentive to her," said Kapustin. "It's very rewarding to have another member added to our Masai giraffe group at the zoo to share with our guests and help interpret further our wildlife conservation messaging and initiatives."

Kapustin added that Miles would remain separated from Autumn and the calf for the next few weeks to allow time for them to bond without interruption, and time for the calf to gain strength and ability to navigate the giraffe exhibit.

The public may get a chance to see the baby giraffe when the zoo reopens from annual maintenance on Feb. 10, according to Kapustin. But it depends on the weather. The zoo's giraffes are usually kept inside if the temperature drops below 50 degrees.

The newborn giraffe is expected to stay in Greenville until she is 18 months to 2 years old, according to Kapustin. She will then move on to another facility for breeding at the recommendation of the Species Survival Plan for Masai giraffes in zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The Masai giraffe is the largest subspecies of giraffe and the tallest land mammal in the world, according to the Wild Nature Institute. It is currently listed as "vulnerable to extinction" because of habitats loss and poaching, which have reduced the population by more than 50 percent in the last three decades. There are currently 118 Masai giraffes in zoos around the world.

Facts About the Masai Giraffe:

**Range:** Masai giraffes live in the Savannas, grasslands, and open woodlands of eastern Africa. They range throughout Tanzania and southern Kenya.

**Diet:** Masai giraffes use their long tongues to strip leaves, bark, twigs, flowers, and fruits from treetops. They especially like leaves from the acacia tree.

**Life expectancy:** Males: 13.5 years | Females: 19.5 years

**Weight:** Males: 3,000 pounds | Females: 1,500 pounds

**Height:** Males: 18 feet | Females: 14 feet

**Fun fact:** Giraffes only need five to 30 minutes of sleep in a 24-hour period. They usually take quick naps that last only a minute or two at a time.

