



# NEWS RELEASE

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## SANTA BARBARA ZOO CONFIRMS AJAX THE CRITICALLY ENDANGERED FEMALE AMUR LEOPARD IS PREGNANT

***This will be the first Amur leopard birth at the Santa Barbara Zoo in more than 20 years***

(July 13, 2021) Santa Barbara, CA – The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) family is growing! The Zoo's Animal Care and Health team has confirmed that Ajax, its female Amur leopard, is pregnant and due later this summer. This will be the first Amur leopard birth at the Santa Barbara Zoo in more than 20 years. Amur leopards are the most endangered of all the big cats, with less than 100 remaining in the wild, and the Zoo has been attempting to breed the species for several years now as part of the conservation efforts for this species. The pairing of Ajax and the Zoo's male Amur leopard and father, Kasha, was recommended by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) as part of the Amur Leopard Species Survival Plan (SSP), a program coordinated to maintain genetic diversity of threatened and endangered species in human care.

"This is tremendously exciting news for the Santa Barbara Zoo given the critically endangered status of the Amur leopard," said Dr. Julie Barnes, the Zoo's Vice President of Animal Care & Health.

"Conservation is a critical part of our mission, and we're proud to celebrate Ajax's pregnancy with our colleagues and conservation partners, as well as the Santa Barbara community and beyond. Breeding Amur leopards is complicated and challenging and our team has worked really hard to help Ajax get pregnant."

This is the first pregnancy for Ajax, and it will be the fourth litter for Kasha, who arrived at the Zoo in March 2020, just prior to the first coronavirus closure. Amur leopards have a short gestation period of approximately three to three-and-a-half-months, so there is a limited window of time to prepare. Thanks to the strong bonds the Zoo's animal care team has developed with her, Ajax was trained to voluntarily participate in ultrasound imaging. The Zoo's Animal Care team will continue to monitor Ajax closely, particularly during the final stages of her pregnancy, in addition to preparing for the birth.

"Now that Ajax is pregnant, the next step is working towards her successfully giving birth and rearing her cubs," continued Barnes. "Big cat births can have unpredictable outcomes, and especially with first time mothers. Providing her with an appropriate denning area and undisturbed time to bond with her cubs is an important part of this process."

Ajax is seven years old, and arrived at the Santa Barbara Zoo in 2016, from the Marwell Zoo in Hampshire, England. Her genetics are unrepresented in North American AZA zoos and aquariums, so she plays an important role in diversifying the gene pool of Amur leopards in North America for the overall health of the population. Kasha is 11 years old, and came from the Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, IL.

He was born in Nesles, France at Le Parc des Felins. He was imported to the Brookfield Zoo in 2013, where he sired three litters in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

Amur leopards are typically solitary in nature, coming together only for breeding purposes, so introductions can be a long, slow and complicated process. For the safety of the animals, they have to be gradually acclimated to each other's smell and presence which can take a long time. The female is most receptive to sharing space with the male when she is ready to mate but their behavior towards each other can be unpredictable. The first full contact introduction between Ajax and Kasha took place in November 2020 and continued on and off depending on when Ajax was ready to mate. Using hormone analysis via fecal testing, her reproductive cycle was monitored as well as determining when she was pregnant. The reproductive cycle of the Amur leopard is not well understood, so information obtained from monitoring Ajax will contribute to a better understanding of reproduction in this critically endangered species.

Ajax is generously sponsored by Alaia & Jax, two special members of a local anonymous family who are her Premier Foster Feeders. Kasha is generously sponsored by the Wyatt family, who are his Premier Foster Feeders. To learn more about how to support the Zoo's Amur leopards as an animal sponsor, please visit <https://sbzoo.pivvit.com/foster-feeder>.

For updates and more on Ajax's pregnancy, the public is encouraged to tune in to the Zoo's social media channels ([Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#)) to follow along.

### **About Amur Leopards**

Amur leopards are the most endangered big cats in the world. They have also been called the Korean leopard, Far East leopard, and Manchurian leopard, which echoes their historic range, spanning the Korean Peninsula into northeast China's Jilin and Heilongjiang Provinces, and across the border into the Russian Far East and Amur River basin, from which the species now takes its name.

Just under 100 are estimated to remain in the wild, in a small area between Vladivostok, Russia, and the Chinese border, along with a few scattered individuals in China. Their threats include poaching, forest fires, development, and, at this point, inbreeding. Approximately 200 Amur leopards are in human care, primarily in zoos in North America, Europe, and countries of the former Soviet Union, and are part of globally cooperative conservation breeding programs.

### **About the Santa Barbara Zoo**

The Santa Barbara Zoo is open daily from 9 a.m. for members and 9:30 a.m. for general admission until 5 p.m. (seasonal extended hours on select days); general admission is \$19.95 for adults, \$14.95 for children 2-12, and free for children under 2. Parking is \$11. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA zoos are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great visitor experience, and a better future for all living things. With its more than 200 accredited members, AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation and is the public's link to helping animals in their native habitats. Visit [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org).

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