



## MEDIA ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 6, 2009

### ZOO OFFICIALS ANNOUNCE POSSIBLE PREGNANCY OF NAKED MOLE RAT QUEEN

**WHAT:** Zoo Atlanta's strangest animal society may be expecting their first litter. Zoo Atlanta's Animal Management and Veterinary Teams are reasonably certain that the naked mole rat queen is pregnant based on several changes as bizarre as the species itself.

The pregnancy also confirms that the dominant female has officially been crowned the monarch of her underground kingdom. Rival naked mole rat females fight for supremacy, and the dominant female is recognized as queen by the rest of the colony. Over a period of months, her vertebrae become elongated, resulting in a gradual expansion of her skeletal structure until she is physically larger and longer than any other member of the colony.

Naked mole rat gestation is 72 days, but Zoo Atlanta officials aren't certain as to when the new queen will deliver. The litter size is 5 to 15 pups, although naked mole rat queens have been known to birth as many as 27 pups at a time.

Native to subterranean tunnels beneath the grasslands of Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, naked mole rats and a related species, the Damaraland mole rat, are the world's only known eusocial mammals. Naked mole rat colonies are hierarchically arranged in the service of a queen, similarly to bees, ants and termites. Only the queen breeds, typically with one to three select males; other colony members serve as soldiers or workers.

**WHERE:** Zoo Atlanta  
800 Cherokee Avenue, S.E.  
Atlanta, GA 30315

**CONTACT:** Keisha N. Hines Davis, Director of Public Relations and Communications  
404.624.5980 – office  
404.309.2238 – cell  
[Khines-davis@zooatlanta.org](mailto:Khines-davis@zooatlanta.org)

Simone Griffin, Public Relations Coordinator  
404.624.2809  
[sgriffin@zooatlanta.org](mailto:sgriffin@zooatlanta.org)

**ABOUT:** About Zoo Atlanta

An accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Zoo Atlanta inspires value and preservation of wildlife through a unique mix of education and outdoor family fun. From well-known native wildlife to critically endangered species on the brink of extinction, the Zoo offers memorable close encounters with more than 1,000 animals from around the world. The Zoo's newest attraction, Boundless Budgies: A Parakeet Adventure, opened in April 2009. The interactive new experience is the largest of its kind in the Southeast. Zoo Atlanta is also the proud home of Xi Lan, the only giant panda cub born in the U.S. in 2008. Other highlights include one of the nation's most recognized collections of great apes and a global center of excellence for the care and reproduction of vanishing amphibians and reptiles. Zoo Atlanta is open daily with the exceptions of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Keeper talks, interactive wildlife shows, education programs and special events run year-round. For more information, call 404.624.WILD or go to [zooatlanta.org](http://zooatlanta.org).

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