



NEWS RELEASE

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TINY ELEPHANTS?

NORFOLK, Va. – Two new baby rock hyrax are now receiving visitors at the Virginia Zoo's Africa – Okavango Delta exhibit.

The little mammals were actually born July 6, but can now be seen with the four adults in the hyrax habitat, if you're stealthy enough...

"They're out there, but if they see you coming, they wedge themselves into a crevice to hide," said Roger Sweeney, the Virginia Zoo's assistant director. He added that even the adults can be difficult to spot, because they sit high on the rocks and freeze in place. The babies are expected to develop similar behavior as they grow older.

Hyraxes come from Africa and the Middle East. They are small, heavy-set mammals. Adults range between 1 and 2 feet in length and weigh from 5 to 9 pounds. They eat a variety of plants, mainly grasses. Hyrax feet have rubbery pads with numerous sweat glands, which together form a kind of suction cup that helps their grip when climbing steep rocky surfaces. Their efficient kidneys retain water, helping them survive arid climates. Hyraxes live in small family groups dominated by a single adult male.

Hyraxes' ancestors gave rise to elephants and manatees, and modern hyraxes have many features in common with elephants, including excellent hearing, sensitive pads on their feet and good memory. Their upper incisors are enlarged, forming continuously growing tusks.

"They're small, but they can be a handful," said Craig Pelke, an animal curator at the Zoo. "They have an attitude that can match the size of their elephant cousins."

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A baby rock hyrax gets an initial veterinary check up at the Virginia Zoo Thursday, July 14, 2011 (Virginia Zoo photo by Winfield Danielson).

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As an accredited Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) facility, the Virginia Zoo exhibits more than 400 animals on 53 beautifully landscaped acres. For more than a century, the Virginia Zoo has demonstrated a commitment to education and conservation, and offered a fun-filled day for visitors of any age. Open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and located at 3500 Granby Street in Norfolk. Daily admission prices are \$11.00 for adults, \$10.00 for seniors (age 62 and over) and \$9.00 for children ages 2-11. Visit www.virginiazoo.org or call (757) 441-2374 for more information.