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***NEW YEAR, NEW HOPE FOR RARE AVIAN SPECIES: NORTH AMERICA'S FIRST
AFRICAN SHOEBILL STORK CHICK HATCHES AT TAMPA'S LOWRY PARK ZOO***

Special Stork Delivery May Lead to Better Understanding of Biology of Rare Species

TAMPA, Fla. (January 7, 2010) – On Christmas Day 2009, Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo became the first wildlife institution in the North America to hatch a rare African shoebill stork chick, and just the second institution worldwide. The chick began pipping (first stage of hatching) at approximately 7:30 a.m. on December 25, and was observed fully out of the egg, alert and vocalizing by the evening of December 26.

The species' numbers in captivity are few, with only 12 adult shoebills in North American wildlife institutions, four of which are housed at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo. The population of wild shoebills is thought to number 8,000-10,000 with the species listed as vulnerable, but is difficult to estimate given the animals' native habitat of dense marshes and swamps of East-Central Africa.

"The successful reproduction of shoebill storks is a remarkable achievement for Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo," remarked ornithologist Kevin Bell, chairman of the board of directors for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). "The shoebill population is uncommon in the wild, and rarely seen in zoos. This is a great accomplishment that is helping the conservation of this unique species."

"This is a momentous way to start the New Year," said Craig Pugh, deputy director, acting CEO, of Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo noting that The United Nations has declared 2010 the International Year of Biodiversity. "Successful hatching of a shoebill here shows what a zoo can do, both as an enjoyable place to visit and as a conservation organization that helps to protect the variety of life on Earth."

Known as one of the great bird species of Africa, shoebills are tall (3.5 to 4 feet), darkly colored birds (blue-grey) with unusually large bills up to 12 inches long and 5 inches wide that resemble the shape of a wooden shoe. A broad wingspan and long, strong legs give this rare bird a stork-like appearance. Common names for shoebills include shoe-billed stork, whale-headed stork or bog bird.

Though considered a stork, the shoebill's history is unclear, and no relatives are known. Shoebills share behaviors and physiological features of herons, and have common characteristics with pelicans. They are known to nest on the ground near water where they forage in shallow, aquatic environments.

The Zoo manages two pair of shoebills in two aviaries within the Ituri Forest exhibit area. In 2009, the Zoo turned its North Lake into a giant free-flight aviary featuring dozens of greater African flamingos, great white pelicans, shoebill storks, yellow-billed storks, white-breasted cormorants and a group of ring-tailed lemurs on an island. The parent birds established a nest site earlier in the year, and the female laid an egg, a first in North America, on October 3. This egg was accidentally crushed by the new parents; however the female laid a second egg on November 11 which successfully incubated.

To date, the parent birds are extremely attentive and sharing in the brooding responsibilities. Feeding has been established, which was another major milestone. Aviary Zoo keepers have conducted "dawn to dusk" watches to document feeding by the parent birds and response by the chick. Based on limited available data, it is anticipated that the chick will remain in the nest for approximately 120 days.

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo has celebrated many noteworthy animal collection accomplishments in 2009, starting in the summer with the first Indian rhino birth for the Zoo, followed in the fall by first okapi calf, and now the first shoebill stork hatching in North America.

"These significant accomplishments are meaningful examples of the important role that captive propagation plays in wildlife conservation, and can only be achieved with the hard work of dedicated animal care staff supported by Zoo management and the Lowry Park Zoological Society Board of Trustees," said Dr. Larry Killmar, the Zoo's director of collections. "The hatching of the shoebill has offered an unprecedented opportunity to help us further understand the biology of this species, as well as to appreciate the uniqueness of these magnificent creatures. The Zoo is fortunate to have an opportunity to assist with research, conservation and breeding efforts of this species in a climate similar to the shoebill's native habitat."

The shoebill stork breeding program at Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo is made possible by Triad Foundation. The Zoo's Ituri Forest habitat area, which houses the North Lake aviary, was made possible by funding provided by the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners.

About Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo

Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo is operated by the Lowry Park Zoological Society, an independent 501(c)(3) charitable organization committed to excellence in education, conservation and research. Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), and has been named the No. 1 zoo in America by both *Parents* magazine (2009) and *Child* magazine (2004). The Zoo is located at 1101 W. Sligh Avenue in Tampa, one mile west of I-275 (exit 48) and is open seven days a week, from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. Parking is free. Visit LowryParkZoo.com or call (813) 935-8552 for information. Also find the Zoo on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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