



For Immediate Release

22 August 2011

From Tim Tetzlaff, Director of Conservation & Communications 239.262.5409 x 122 / tim@napleszoo.org

Rarely Seen Fierce African Badgers Premiere at Naples Zoo

Naples, FL – In South Africa, the idiom “tough as nails” doesn’t cut it. To assert a rough-and-ready attitude, the phrase is “as tough as a ratel.” These fearless and persistent creatures are recorded attacking cobras, shredding into beehives amidst the stinging swarm, and even chasing lions off their kills. All the more amazing when you consider this brashness is bottled inside a mere 25-pound creature with the deceptively friendly nickname of *African honey badger*. Beginning August 20, Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens becomes one of only four American zoos where you can see this extraordinary species.

Fearless and persistent perfectly describes the ratel. They will rip wooden planks from hen houses and dig under walls to get a meal. Even the stings of bees do not deter them from tearing into beehives with their immense claws. Fortunately, their thick skin and dense hair protects them from many stings. (It is that taste for honey that earned them the “honey badger” name.) Their diet also includes scorpions, rodents, berries, roots, and tortoises. In a still unknown process, ratels survive envenomation by cobras, puff adders, and other deadly snakes. After killing the snake, the bitten ratel drops and remains still as if dead, but eventually rises from its toxic stupor to eat its would be assassin.

Although commonly associated with Africa, the honey badger ranges all the way to India. When cornered, ratels will savagely attack and predators have learned to leave them alone. Even the South African army named their armored infantry fighting vehicle the ratel in honor of their toughness.

-- MORE --

The three ratels arrived in Naples a few months ago from Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo, another nationally accredited zoo. After the standard quarantine time to insure their health and to make habitat renovations, the ratels are ready to greet Zoo guests. And "habitat renovations" is putting it lightly. Heavy tie wires on the mesh walls were replaced with even heavier steel. Feeding dens were completely rebuilt. The ground was excavated and covered in 6-gauge chain link; the chain-link seams were ringed together and concreted, as was the entire perimeter of the habitat. Finally, a naturalistic rock wading and swimming pool was crafted before the habitat was refilled with dirt.

Naples Zoo at Caribbean Gardens is a new 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has opened five feature exhibits in the last five years including the Giraffe Preview Exhibit where guests can hand-feed the giraffe herd. The nationally accredited zoo is nestled in a 43-acre historic botanical garden founded in 1919 and cooperates in conservation programs both in and outside the wild for endangered species. Naples Zoo offers families a full day wild fun from apes to zebras featuring wildlife shows, cruises and other entertaining educational programming which reached over 300,000 guests in 2010.

Daily presentations include Alligator Bay Feeding; Meet the Keeper Series; and *Jungle Larry™ and Safari Jane's™ Snakes Alive!* featuring venomous snakes. Guests also enjoy two premiere presentations in the Safari Canyon theater where they see live animals from unusual predators and other rare wildlife along with exciting video footage. And one of the zoo's most popular activities is the Primate Expedition Cruise where guests embark on a guided cruise through islands inhabited by monkeys, lemurs, and apes.

The all-day pay-one-price ticket includes admission to both the nationally accredited zoo and historic garden along with all shows, tours, exhibits, and the boat ride. (\$19.95 adults age 13+/ \$12.95 children 3 to 12, under 3 free. Children under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult at least 18 years of age). Annual memberships and the discount tickets are also available online at www.napleszoo.org. Visitors enjoy healthy meals at Wynn's at the Zoo and shop for wild gifts in The ZOO Gift Shop. Naples Zoo welcomes guests daily from 9:00 to 5:00 with the last ticket sold at 4:00 and is located at 1590 Goodlette-Frank Road across from the Coastland Center mall in the heart of Naples. To learn more, click www.napleszoo.org or call (239) 262-5409. Follow the Zoo at www.twitter.com/NaplesZoo.

Print Quality Ratel Image is available for immediate download at www.napleszoo.org/press



###

www.napleszoo.org
(239) 262-5409 ext 122

