



Hard to believe: This tapir is 36 years old. Lilith lives in the Wilhelma Zoo & Botanical Gardens in Stuttgart, Germany.

Photo by Volker Kruschenski

New Longevity Record in Tapirs

By Stefan Seitz

After achieving her 36th birthday on 1 June 2002, Lilith probably became the world's oldest tapir. The female Malay tapir (*Tapirus indicus*) was born in Nuremberg, Germany, in 1966 and was the second offspring of Schlappi and Josephine, two wild caught individuals from Thailand who started the captive breeding era in Europe. She moved to the Wilhelma Zoo in Stuttgart on 17 April 1968. She still lives there in the Hippo and Tapir House.

Separated from another pair of Malay tapirs, Lilith usually stays in the indoor stall which has a tiled floor and a shallow pool. The small outdoor area with natural earth substrate and grass is only used for occasional sunbathing. Although the female rests most of the time, she is in a surprisingly good physical state. She moves about well and her skin and hair look healthy. Her sense of smell is very sensitive, which probably compensates for her dramatically reduced eyesight. Her head keeper, Volker Kruschenski, reported that she has lost only a few molar teeth, so is still able to chew whole apples. Volker feeds her a normal diet that consists of fruits, vegetables and pellets. There are no added supplements or medication. Lilith's only offspring, Lydia, died at the age of 23.

There is no record of any tapir over the age of 36. Longevity in Malay tapirs is documented at some 35 years; a female from Bangkok, Thailand, lived for 30 years in the San Diego Zoo, California, USA and gave birth to 15 calves (Barongi, 1998). A male lowland tapir, in Wroclaw Zoo, Poland, reached the age of 35 (Smielowski, 1979). The oldest known Baird's tapir (*Tapirus bairdii*), a wild-born male from San Diego Zoo, died at some 29 years (Sheryl Todd, pers. comm.). The Wilhelma Zoo in Stuttgart, Germany, also holds the record for a female mountain tapir that was imported from Ecuador and reached the age of at least 28 (Holtkötter, 1998).

References

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