



U.S. EMBASSY - BAGHDAD

## 2008 Provincial Reconstruction Team News

### -Bengal Tigers Make Baghdad Zoo Their New Home-

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**Baghdad, Iraq** - After traveling thousands of miles from the United States, two Bengal tiger cubs, called Hope and Riley, are making Iraq their new home thanks, in part, to a cooperative effort by Coalition Forces, the U.S. Embassy, Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and Iraqi veterinarians to upgrade the Baghdad Zoo.



*Baghdad Zoo Welcomes Two Rare Tiger Cubs*

The tigers were donated to the Iraqis by the Conservators Center located in Pittsboro, North Carolina, which specializes in large cat rescue and breeding. Veterinarians from the Center accompanied the tigers by air to Baghdad, which was paid for by the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

The Baghdad Zoo had been readying itself to receive the tigers for more than one year. Preparations involved preparing a new living space to include a wading pool, training the zoo's veterinarian staff, and ensuring a proper diet for the cubs.

The 2 Brigade Combat Team (BCT) of the 101st Airborne Div and a Baghdad Embedded PRT collaborated on improvements to the zoo, including assisting with construction projects, training programs and international linkages. In addition, U.S. and international zoos and other partners have assisted in the redevelopment and reopening of the zoo.

Fourteen Iraqi veterinarians employed by the zoo have also established a close working relationship with Coalition Forces and with leading international educational institutions. Two members of the veterinary staff have been selected to attend advanced training in exotic animal care at the Chester Zoo in the United Kingdom.

The Baghdad Zoo is visited by tens of thousands of Iraqi each week seeking the zoo's unique recreational and educational experience. The zoo is a significant employer with a sizable professional and support staff and provides small private business opportunities, including vendor stands, restaurants, a gift shop, and a boat rental concession.

Weighing in at 150 lbs. each, Hope and Riley arrived in Baghdad on August 4 after being flown from the United States with the assistance of the U.S. Military and the American Embassy in Baghdad.

“We are thrilled to welcome these two beautiful animals to our family at the Baghdad Zoo,” commented Zoo Director Dr. Adel Salman Mousa. “In addition to the enjoyment people will get from watching them, they will present opportunities for students and the public to learn about this and other endangered species.”

CPT Jason Felix, from the U.S. 101st Airborne Division, who has worked closely with the zoo, remarked, “This is a good day for the tigers, the zoo and the people of Baghdad. I think the zoo’s progress, culminating in today’s arrival of the two tigers, exemplifies some of the good news coming out of Baghdad as life begins to return more to normal here.”

Established in 1973, the Baghdad Zoo suffered from looting in the aftermath of the fall of Saddam Hussein. With the help of international partners it has been renovated and is once again a leafy oasis of enjoyment in the heart of Baghdad.

The U.S. military has in past worked closely with zoo officials on several reconstruction projects. The American Embassy in Baghdad contributed funds to pay for the transportation cost of the cubs from the United States to Iraq, including the provision of specialized cages. The donating organization in North Carolina has also been active in ensuring that the Baghdad Zoo had the capacity to provide long-term quality care for the tigers.