

Feline good!

France's Le Parc des Félines has had great breeding success in recent months, as these wonderful pictures show

Grégory Breton & Sébastien Verdin, Le Parc des Félines, Nesles



Since 1998, Le Parc des Félines has successfully bred many cat species, from the smallest species (rusty-spotted cats, margays, fishing cats) to the biggest (snow leopards, Amur and Sumatran tigers).

2008 will also remain a memorable year as the park celebrated the birth of 1.1 jaguarundis and 0.1 Asiatic golden cat, two species never bred before at the park and the first ever in France!

In brief, it was the arrival of 2.1 jaguarundis from São Paulo – in particular the male named 'Scofield' – which stimulated the 4-year old female 'Catty'. She came into oestrus and several acts of mating were observed between 6 and 12 May, exactly 13 days after the male was introduced. The 2 kittens 'Iguacu' and 'Guaroni' were born 22 July 2008. The gestation period consequently ranges from 72 to 78 days; a few days longer than the 70 days always mentioned in literature.

For a successful introduction, 'Scofield' and 'Catty' were placed in two adjacent enclosures linked by a tunnel which can be opened or closed when needed by the keepers in charge of the species. After introduction and for 13 days they stayed apart, but when the female was in heat they were observed to be constantly together. At the end of the female's oestrus, the breeding pair was permanently separated.

'Catty' appeared to be a very protective mother despite the fact that this was her first litter: The two kittens were not allowed to do whatever they wanted and they took their first steps outside the breeding den under strong surveillance. Visitors were not able to observe the kittens for a month. Today, the offspring have almost reached their adult size and will leave the park very soon.



JAGUARUNDI BORN IN FRANCE (NESLES) COPYRIGHT: CATHERINE PATRON AND PHILIPPE LICHTFOUSE



But the most important birth of 2008 was surely that of 'Swa Fai', a female Asiatic golden cat. About 70 days after mating with the male named 'Yang', the female 'Markit' gave birth on 4 July to a single kitten.

The Asian golden cat is well known for its nocturnal habits and the possible aggressive behaviour of males towards females in captivity. Therefore, many zoos choose to separate each pair every evening, record their behaviour at night and watch the tape the next morning to detect any signs of oestrus in the female. This method has proved its worth since it has resulted in several births, but because we were not able to use this method at Nesles, the curator and keeper in charge of this species decided, after noticing a slight change in the female's behaviour (calls and rapprochement), to let the pair stay together late in the evening before separating them at 21:30. This was a good decision as not long afterwards the keeper heard a meowing sound in the mother's den!

Silence and caution were strictly followed to let the mother raise her kitten peacefully. The birth was announced a month and a half later and access to the outside enclosure was opened in September. 'Swa Fai' was allowed to take her first steps out by her mother, who looked after her very preciously. A magical moment for the staff and the French visitors who discovered a kitten of this fascinating species for the first time.

It appears that 2009 is continuing in this good form, with the births of a margay on 12 February, and a new Asiatic golden cat on 7 March from the same parents with the same method! This new birth proves there is another valuable and successful approach to breeding this discreet and complicated species.



NEW MARGAY BORN IN FRANCE (NESLES), AT 27 DAYS. COPYRIGHT: SÉBASTIEN VERDIN