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Kronberger Bote – the English page



Opel Zoo and WWF start cooperation to protect the black-backed tapir

Kronberg (eh) – At the Opel Zoo, new enclosures are to be built on 18,000 square meters of zoo grounds for seven Asian animal species, including Indian rhinoceroses and black-backed tapirs. Gibbons, short-clawed otters, Prince Alfred deer and deer goat antelopes are also to move into the area. But the Opel Zoo not only wants to inspire the guests, but also always promote the safeguarding of species in the animals' regions of origin. The protection of the black-backed tapir in the habitat of the endangered species in Thailand is therefore the focus of a new cooperation with the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF).

Species protection is one of the main concerns of zoological gardens, which is becoming increasingly important against the background of climate change and biodiversity loss, emphasizes Gregor von Opel, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the "von Opel Hessische Zoostiftung" (von Opel Hessian Zoo Foundation). "Zoological gardens have a kind of Noah's Ark function," said zoo director Dr. Thomas Kauffels at the presentation of the cooperation. "With their unique expertise in the long-term keeping, care and breeding of endangered wild animal species, the offspring of which are also available for reintroduction to the animals' original distribution areas, zoos can make a significant contribution to the protection of endangered species."



The black-backed tapir with the characteristic black and white fur is the largest Tapir species. It is already considered highly endangered, as its habitats continue to shrink due to deforestation.

Photo: Archive Opel Zoo

On site, however, the preservation of suitable habitats is a decisive factor for the survival of endangered species."

WWF project "Eyes on the Forest"

Although the construction of the planned enclosures for the Asian animals at the Opel

Zoo has not yet begun, support for the WWF project "Eyes on the Forest" is already starting: The "von Opel Hessische Zoostiftung" supporting the Opel Zoo will provide 60,000 euros four times over several years to protect the endangered black-backed tapir in the Thai national parks "Kaeng Krung" and "Kui Buri". The aim of the project is to limit the rate of deforestation in this area, which is home to tapirs, elephants, bears and many other endangered species. This is intended to counteract the loss of globally important habitats and the possible extinction of species, but also to soothe conflicts in land use by neighbouring communities. To this end, a cost-effective forest monitoring system supported by drones equipped with the latest technology will be established. It enables the local national park authorities to quickly and efficiently map the area, detect illegal deforestation and assess the condition of the forest in order to then quickly initiate appropriate measures. "This is also species conservation," reports Susanne Gotthardt, who is supervising the project on behalf of the WWF together with colleagues from the WWF representative office in Thailand. "Because these forests are the last refuges of rare species such as elephant, banteng, sambar, gaur and black-backed tapir. The quality of the drone images is excellent, so that illegal deforestation or illegally created fields and plantations can be seen very well," explains the Southeast Asia

consultant of WWF Germany. Violations are documented by the WWF and can then be punished by the local authorities. "The drone flights are announced and discussed with the farmers on site to create acceptance. In addition, the WWF accompanies numerous associated measures to combat poverty, promote tourism programmes, and agricultural and forestry measures in the buffer zones around the national parks in order to sensitise the population to the work of the WWF."

Animals in the zoo should arouse interest

"From a zoological point of view, the tapir is very interesting," explains zoo director Dr. Thomas Kauffels. The black-backed tapir with the characteristic black and white fur is the largest tapir species and was once widespread throughout Southeast Asia.

Today, it is only found in mostly highly fragmented areas in Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Sumatra. Tapirs are odd-toed ungulates like horses and rhinoceroses and can live for around 25 years. The animals are considered highly endangered, as their habitats continue to shrink due to deforestation. "Tapirs are solitary animals and need an outdoor enclosure with water and in winter a warm indoor enclosure with water, too," reports Kauffels. The animals in the zoo are intended to arouse people's interest in this species in the wild.

The Opel Zoo of "von Opel Hessische Zoostiftung" is the second larger, scientifically managed zoological garden in the Rhine-Main area, after Frankfurt Zoo. It was founded in 1956 on the initiative of Georg von Opel as a research enclosure and was merged into a charitable foundation in 2007. The Opel Zoo is financed exclusively by entrance fees and donations and is one of the most visited leisure and cultural facilities in Hesse. The Opel Zoo is home to about 1700 animals in 200 species from almost all continents.

The preliminary building application for the facility for Asian animal species is currently underway at the District Hochtaunuskreis. Construction of the project, with an estimated investment volume of between 17 and 20 million euros, is scheduled to start in the course of 2025. Visitors are expected to be able to admire the first black-backed tapirs in the new facility in 2027. But tapir fans can be curious: After the start of the cooperation between Opel Zoo and WWF, further joint activities are to follow soon.



The „von Opel Hessische Zoostiftung“ supporting the Opel Zoo will provide 60,000 euros four times over several years for the WWF project „Eyes on the Forest“. (from left to right) Gregor von Opel, Susanne Gotthardt and Zoo Director Dr. Thomas Kauffels.

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