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Press Release

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National Aviary Introduces Wookie the Sloth

The National Aviary is now home to its first non-avian resident, a Two-toed Sloth named Wookie.

Wookie made his debut January 1, 2008 and has settled in nicely with his more excitable neighbors.



“Wookie’s claim to fame includes his status as the first mammal resident of the National Aviary and his species’ classification as the world’s slowest mammal,” says National Aviary CEO Linda Dickerson.

Visitors to the National Aviary will find Wookie hanging from a branch (basic sloth behavior 24/7), just as he would do in the rainforest. Sloths spend nearly all of their time aloft, hanging from branches with a powerful grip aided

by their long claws. Sloths eat, sleep, mate and give birth while hanging in trees.

It’s also likely that Wookie will be napping – sloths sleep a lot, up to 20 hours a day. In fact, sloths are so sedentary that in the wild, algae grows on their fur, providing additional camouflage in the trees of the rainforest.

Two-toed Sloth Facts

- Wookie, the National Aviary’s first mammal resident, is a Linnaeus's Two-toed Sloth (*Choloepus didactylus*), a species of sloth found throughout the rainforests of Central and South America. They are arboreal, spending most of their lives in trees.
- Sloths are strictly herbivores (plant-eaters). In the wild, they feed mainly on plant leaves, tender young shoots and fruit. Sloths get most of the water that they need from their food.
- Sloths have adapted well to living upside down. Even their fur grows upside down (from their bellies towards their backs) to allow rainwater to roll off of them while they are hanging from tree branches.
- The sloth is the world's slowest mammal, so sedentary that algae grows on its furry coat. The plant gives it a greenish tint that is useful camouflage in the trees of its Central and South American rain forest home.
- Sloths are identified by the number of long, prominent claws that they have on each front foot. There are both two-toed and three-toed sloths.

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Wookie
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- All sloths are built for life in the treetops. They spend nearly all of their time aloft, hanging from branches with a powerful grip aided by their long claws. (Dead sloths have been known to retain their grip and remain suspended in the air.)

Sloths even sleep in trees, and they sleep a lot—some 15 to 20 hours every day.

- Even when awake they often remain motionless, and two-toed sloths are generally silent. At night they eat leaves, shoots, and fruit from the trees and get almost all of their water from juicy plants.

- Sloths mate and give birth while hanging in the trees. Young two-toed sloths are often seen clinging to their mothers; they travel by hanging onto them for the first five weeks of their lives.

- On land, sloths' weak hind legs provide no power and their long claws are a hindrance. They must dig into the earth with their front claws and use their strong front legs to pull themselves along, dragging their bellies across the ground. If caught on land, these animals have no chance to evade predators, such as big cats, and must try to defend themselves by clawing and biting.

- Though they couldn't be clumsier on land, sloths are surprisingly good swimmers. They sometimes fall directly from rain forest trees into rivers and stroke efficiently with their long arms.

- The two-toed sloth's main enemies are man, large birds of prey like the Harpy Eagle and Crested Eagle, and cats like the Ocelot.

- Because of their slow metabolism, sloths are incapable of keeping their body temperatures constant in a cooler environment. This restricts them to hot, humid tropical rainforests. Rainforest habitats are threatened by destruction throughout all of the two-toed sloth's range. When forests are cut for agricultural or timber, often sloths are unable to escape because they are just too slow to move to other areas.

The National Aviary is open daily from 10 am to 5 pm. Admission is \$9 adults; \$8 seniors; \$7.50 children two and up. Children under two admitted free. More information at www.aviary.org or by calling 412.323.7235.

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