

Baby elephant to make big debut

By Kathy Lord

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Zoo keepers say the as-yet unnamed baby elephant is a real character. (ABC TV)

Victorians will get their first peek at Melbourne Zoo's new baby elephant from tomorrow.

It is the first baby elephant born in the zoo's 148-year history.

The as-yet unnamed female, born on January 16, will go on display for short periods of time at first, but the viewing time would be extended once she has adjusted to life in the public glare.

The baby is the first elephant in Australia conceived by artificial insemination and only the second baby elephant ever born in Australia.

But she will not be on her own for long.

The zoo is expecting another baby elephant in August or September this year.

Melbourne Zoo director Kevin Tanner says his staff did a great job ensuring the birth went smoothly.

But he says it has not all been plain sailing.

"Getting a baby elephant to bond with its mother and other members of the herd has not been an easy task," he said.

"But I think everyone who comes to see the baby and Dokkoon will appreciate that they have done an amazing job in a very short time."

Zoo keeper Dan Maloney says staff have fallen in love with the little elephant.

"She's a ball of energy. She's intrepid. She's completely fearless," he said.

"We've found her to be an animal that's so endearing. Certainly the rest of herd is learning how to adapt to little this crazy unpredictable creature as well."

He says she also loves the water, batting a red ball about in a pool in the enclosure.

"She's just a really wonderful creature. None of us could have predicted how fun she is to watch," he said.

Mr Maloney says the baby elephant now weighs about 140 kilograms and is gaining a kilo a day just on mother's milk.

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