



Miracle elephant makes nervous debut

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Sydney's miracle baby elephant has made a nervous and wobbly debut appearance at Taronga Zoo. Nicknamed Mr Shuffles, the male calf began exploring his enclosure with his mum, 18-year-old Thai elephant Porntip, on Sunday.

It is the first time he has left the barn where he was born on Wednesday after a difficult, nine-day labour that had experts believing he had died in the womb.

Zoo staff have been working around the clock to care for the calf since his eventful beginnings.

Early on Sunday, he began showing signs he was ready for his first foray into the outside world.

Dwarfed by the size of his mother, the baby unsteadily shuffled through the enclosure, occasionally venturing out from underneath her belly to check out the surroundings.

Peering out from behind her thick legs, he waved his tiny trunk and flapped an ear before again disappearing into her shadow.

In a show of curiosity, he tried to follow Porntip up a slope but retreated when he nearly took a tumble as his legs started to give way.

"He's excited to be alive," the zoo's Elephant Manager Gary Miller said.

"He's looking around and seeing the world.

"It's a little bit unnerving for him ... if anything I would say he's probably a little more nervous, tentative than (cousin) Luk Chai."

Mr Miller said the milestone is another sign the calf will grow into a healthy elephant.

"Because of his compromised position as he came out and was born, we didn't know if he had brain damage from lack of oxygen from such a prolonged birth," he told reporters.

"I'd say he's going to be 100 per cent."

Mr Miller says Porntip has also proved to be an excellent mother who has bonded extremely well with her newborn - perhaps as a result of their ordeal.

"She's going to be very protective, she's very maternal and she's going to continue to be that," he said.

"She's going through the highs and lows ... (but) you can see she is happy."

As the pair hovered on the edge of their watering hole, onlookers admired the scene.

"He's such cute little thing," said Leah Jacobs who went with her two young children.

"It's really amazing to see him out and about, walking around after such a traumatic start to life."

The zoo has put forward seven Thai names for the calf, which will be decided by public vote.

They include Pathi Harn, which means miracle, Tay Wan (boy in heaven), Ming Khwan (good internal strength and attitude), Nam Chok (brings with him good fortune), Mongkon (auspicious), Boon Thung (merit has led to reaching this life), and Chok Dee (very good luck).

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