**NUTRIENT INTAKE BY GESTATING AND LACTATING AARDVARK (*ORYCTEROPUS AFER*) AND GROWTH OF MOTHER-REARED CALF**

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**Abstract**

Aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*) calves born into human care are often assist-reared, so little information exists about a lactation diet that would support the normal growth of a mother-reared aardvark calf. In October 2020, a female aardvark calf was born at Disney’s Animal Kingdom®, and its mother successfully nursed and raised the calf through weaning. The diet of the dam consisted of a commercial insectivore pellet, superworms (*Zophobas morio*), and produce. Her diet was adjusted in response to behavior or body weight changes. High calorie items, such as superworms, were exchanged for less nutrient dense items, such as zucchini, to help manage weight during gestation without excessively reducing total food intake. During lactation, insectivore pellets were increased to maintain body weight and manage behavior around feeding. The gestation diet contained 3,260 kcal of gross energy (50.3 kcal/kg BW) and 184 g of crude protein (2.8 g/kg BW) on average per day, and the lactation diet contained 5,335 kcal of gross energy (88.1 kcal/kg BW) and 310 g of crude protein (5.1 g/kg BW) on average per day. The calf was weaned around 7 months of age when she was approximately 65% of the weight of her dam. Solid food, in the form of a banana and avocado smoothie and a small amount of insectivore pellets, were offered to her daily starting around 3.5 months of age. The smoothie was well-accepted but she resisted eating the insectivore pellets until weaning. After weaning, she consumed ~1% of BW in insectivore pellets daily. Growth of the calf was linear while nursing, with a growth rate of 0.19 kg/day. Body weight did not change for ~10 days following weaning, then growth resumed at a rate of 0.16 kg/day. Careful monitoring of diets can help give the calf a healthy start to life by ensuring proper growth and adequate nutrient intake.

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