First reindeer calf an annual sign of spring at UAF

By Debbie Carter

It’s a sure sign of spring — the arrival of the first reindeer calf at the Fairbanks Experiment Farm.

The event occurred on April 4 this year at the University of Alaska Fairbanks facility, which keeps a herd of reindeer for research.

Reindeer caretaker Erin Carr said the calf was born at 10:30 a.m., just 10 minutes after a co-worker noticed the cow was in labor.

Reindeer calf 1701 curled up in a ball near her mother, Astrid, the next morning. As visitors watched, the cow nudged her calf with a hoof to get her up to nurse. The calf wobbled to her feet for breakfast in a reindeer pen opposite the Georgeson Botanical Garden.

Carr said the calf seems healthy. The first calf usually arrives in early April. Altogether, about 20 calves are expected this spring. They will become part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Reindeer Research Program herd, which numbered 65 as of Tuesday morning.

Darrell Blodgett, the data manager for the program, monitors the herd by video camera from his office at the farm to make sure deliveries are progressing well and the staff is aware of cows in labor.

As is tradition, schoolchildren are encouraged to submit names for the calves, which are named in July or August, after they are weaned. Many of the ideas seem to come from children’s movies, Carr said.

“When Harry Potter was popular, we had names like Hagrid and Hermione,” she said.

Children may submit names on the Reindeer Research Program website at http://reindeer.salrm.uaf.edu/index.php. Names selected last year include Hodor, Jorah, Podrick, Two Socks, Chicory, Diego and Taco Supreme.

The Reindeer Research Program is the only program devoted to reindeer research that is affiliated with a U.S. university. The program conducts research on nutrition, animal health, meat quality and range management to support the reindeer industry.

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Cutlines:

*UAF photo by Zayn Roohi  
The first reindeer calf of 2017 at the UAF Experimental Farm was born on April 5.*

*UAF photo by Zayn Roohi  
A mother reindeer snuggles with her calf soon after its birth at the Fairbanks Experiment Farm.*