



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: JJ Vitale ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 145 ▪ cell: 904-635-5035 ▪ vitalej@jacksonvillezoo.org
Janet Wesley ▪ 904.757.4463, ext. 210 ▪ cell: 904-472-3699 ▪ wesleyj@jacksonvillezoo.org

Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens Mourns Mandrill Rafiki's Passing

November 16, 2016-- *Jacksonville, FL* – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) family is greatly saddened to announce the passing of adult male mandrill, Rafiki, on Saturday, November 12. Zoo veterinary staff made the difficult decision to euthanize Rafiki when his advanced age and worsening congestive heart failure stole his quality of life.

Rafiki would have turned 20 years old in April, the median life expectancy for mandrills. This last October, keepers noticed a decrease in activity that prompted a medical examination. Veterinary staff diagnosed Rafiki with advanced congestive heart failure. Though he had a poor prognosis, veterinary staff developed an aggressive treatment plan which was able to extend his life several weeks. While veterinary staff worked valiantly to prolong Rafiki's time with his group, the keepers who comprise the mandrill care team developed an end-of-life plan that addressed the special needs Rafiki would face in his condition.

Keepers and animal health staff closely monitored Rafiki, adjusted treatment and modified training behaviors. On November 12, the difficult decision was made to humanely euthanize.

Believed to be a non-breeder when he came to JZG in 2013, Rafiki went on to sire six offspring. Rafiki, the alpha male of the Zoo's mandrill troop, leaves behind three offspring at the Zoo, including the youngest female born less than two months ago, Bobby, two and a half years old, and Obi who is one and a half years old.

Rafiki was a docile and gentle father. He served as leader of the group, keeping the youngsters in line and grooming his females. The family was able to visit his body after his death.

He had striking blue eyes, a very rare trait among non-human primates. His son Bobby inherited one blue eye. Rafiki was also unique in that he was deaf. Keepers joke that they sometimes looked like 'air traffic controllers trying to get his attention,' but when he did see them, he would eagerly come over to accept food or participate in a training session.

Primary mandrill keeper, Bobby Fink, remembers when he first met the colorful Rafiki, "Charles Darwin crowned the mandrill the most colorful of all mammals, but Rafiki took this even further. He had blue eyes, and this combined with the reds, blues, and yellows that gave his face the rest of its color made for a striking appearance. Those who worked with Rafiki, or even had the chance to watch him for some time, know that his personality was even brighter than his face."

While Fink and the rest of JZG staff and visitors miss Rafiki, knowing his legacy will live on through his offspring eases the pain.

The future of the mandrill troop at the Zoo is bright. Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is in the planning of stages of renovating the Great Apes Loop into the innovative and wellness-inspired African Forest. Plans include significantly larger and more complex habitats for mandrills, bonobos, gorillas, colobus monkeys, and lemurs. The African Forest will provide interesting vantage points for both guests and the animals.

Due to the upcoming construction and the young offspring in the mandrill family currently at the Zoo, the timeframe for introducing a new breeding male is being taken into careful consideration by Zoo officials and the Mandrill Species Survival Plan.

Photo credit: Lynde Nunn, Mammal Keeper and Rob Bixby

About Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens

For over 100 years, the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has aimed to inspire the discovery and appreciation of wildlife through innovative experiences in a caring environment. Starting in 1914 with an animal collection of one red deer fawn, the Zoo now has more than 2,000 rare and exotic animals and 1,000 species of plants, boasting the largest botanical garden in Northeast Florida. **The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is a nonprofit organization and a portion of every ticket sold goes to the over 45 conservation initiatives Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens supports around the world, and here in NE Florida.** JZG is proud to be an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit jacksonvillezoo.org