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Zoo Saddened by Death of Beloved Giraffe

December 11, 2018 – *Jacksonville, FL* – Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens is grieving the loss of one of its most well-known and beloved animals with the passing of Duke, the Zoo's 21-year-old bull giraffe.

Born in 1997, Duke has been at the Jacksonville Zoo since 2003. His beautiful, dark coloring and prominent profile made him highly recognizable and easily identifiable within his herd. Duke's sweet nature and willingness to take browse from guests, ensured he was a favorite among visitors.

Early Tuesday morning, giraffe keepers found Duke sitting in the barn and unable to easily get up. After encouraging him to stand, and seeing him unable, the difficult decision to humanely euthanize the treasured giraffe was made.

Giraffe keepers and the animal health team have been treating Duke for degenerative arthritis for the last couple of years. He received multimodal pain relief, including medication and an exercise regimen that encouraged joint strengthening.

"Unlike a person with extremely acute arthritis, an immobile giraffe is unable to utilize braces, canes or other mechanized assistance. Once a giraffe goes down, their prospects are bleak at best. Saying goodbye is always hard and understandably, staff are sad, but thankful his ordeal was brief", says Dan Maloney, Deputy Zoo Director.

Duke sired 18 offspring while at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens, establishing himself as an important figure in the Giraffe Species Survival Plan (SSP), the cooperative breeding program of accredited zoos.

Three of Duke's offspring still reside at the Zoo: Figie, born in 2016, and Dixon and JoJo, born in late 2017. Additionally, Zoo officials believe that two female giraffes are expecting, and that Duke will father two more offspring in early spring.

Keeper staff are grieving for the loss of the personable giraffe.

"We were lucky to have had the opportunity to get to know and work with such a special giraffe," said Corey Neatrou, Mammal Supervisor who worked with Duke for the last 10 years. "If he had lived another 100 years, it would not have been enough time with him."

Duke passed surrounded by his trusted keepers and with the rest of the herd near. A full exam will be conducted to see if there are any other underlying reasons for the death and to study the progression of arthritis in mature giraffes.

[Dropbox link to photos and video of Duke](#)

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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.