



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

Gandai the Gorilla Infant Introduced to Surrogate Mother

February 28, 2019 - *Jacksonville, FL* - The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has introduced Gondai, a Western lowland gorilla infant, to a surrogate mother, 30-year old Bulera. While surrogacy was “Plan B” for the gorilla care team, hoping instead that Gandai’s biological mother Kumbuka would be willing and able to care for the infant, the pairing with Gandai and Bulera is a joyful occasion and the two gorillas are bonding well.

Keepers at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens intervened after Gandai’s birth when Kumbuka was observed incorrectly positioning the infant. The team has provided around-the-clock care for five months with the goal of introducing her to the troop as soon as it would be safe to do so. Kumbuka and the rest of the gorillas were in close contact with the infant throughout the assisted-rearing process to reinforce their bonds. Bulera showed strong interest in Gandai from the beginning.

On the morning of February 26, Gandai was placed on a soft pile of hay in a large family room in the gorilla building. Kumbuka was given access to the room and allowed to have free contact with the infant. Keepers were cautiously optimistic when Kumbuka eventually approached the little one and showed some interest. Kumbuka was initially curious and was even observed holding the baby for a few minutes. Unfortunately, her interest waned and by the end of the day, Kumbuka was actively avoiding Gandai. She did not bring Gandai into her nest to sleep overnight. When keepers saw Kumbuka’s frustration rising the next morning with every approach from Gandai, they knew it was time to consider Plan B.

At 9am on February 27, Kumbuka was given the opportunity to leave Gandai’s room, which she did without hesitation. Bulera was immediately given access to the baby. Immediately the keepers could tell this was a better fit. She was holding the baby within minutes and comforting her with soft vocal rumbles. She carried her around the enclosure, cuddled with her, brought her into her nest to sleep and responded quickly to any cries. Even better, Gandai is smitten with her adoptive mother.

Bulera is an experienced mother who raised 22-year old Madini and George who recently turned four. She is a confident and relaxed mother with a calm demeanor. The fact that young George is fully weaned, precocious, and enjoys independence, and has a close relationship with his father and playmate Patty, facilitated Bulera being available as a surrogate for Gandai.

The situation is still fluid as keepers continue to monitor the two behind-the-scenes and around the clock. Decisions are being made on who to introduce to Bulera and Gandai in next steps when they indicate they are ready.

Kumbuka is contently spending time with silverback Lash. She is not showing any concern about the situation. Keepers are disappointed that Kumbuka was not interested in mothering Gandai, but glad that the two can continue to live in the same group and develop a relationship. They anticipate that she will ultimately play an aunt role to Gandai, like she has done with the other offspring in the group.

The Zoo will announce the date of Gandai's debut with the family group to the exhibit on its social media channels.

[Dropbox link to pictures and video](#)

###

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.