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## **Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Gorilla Troop Strengthening their Bonds with Baby Gandai**

February 1, 2019-- *Jacksonville, FL* – Baby Gandai is currently being raised by keepers separate from the others of her kind, but she is still an integral part of the Western lowland gorilla troop at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. The bonds between the young gorilla and her troop members are essential in the reintroduction process that the Zoo will begin in the next few weeks.

Since Gandai's birth on September 28, the plan has been to reunite her with her mother Kumbuka and the rest of her extended family. Staff-rearing of animal newborns is never ideal, but sometimes special circumstances require exceptional responses. Given that Kumbuka had previously lost two offspring, and was carrying Gandai in the same risky position, the extremely difficult choice was made to save the baby and rear her to be part of the troop in the future.

Gandai has been reared these last four months in close proximity to the rest of her clan. Keepers have been living and caring for the little one right in the gorilla night quarters. The other members of the gorilla family could see and smell Gandai and her them.

Kumbuka and the others in the group enjoy watching Gandai and the keepers. Youngsters Patty and George, who will both turn four in the next couple months, are curious about their future playmate, baby Gandai. Experienced mothers Bulera and Madini both watch Gandai closely and routinely choose to sit near her at the fence.

Lash, Gandai's father, is protective of Gandai but prefers to observe from a distance. However, Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens has a unique, two-male troop and fellow silverback, Rumble, is very engaged with the infant. Rumble is the 34-year-old father to George and playful "uncle" to bubbly Patty.

Gandai's mother, Kumbuka, who only arrived in Jacksonville in 2014, has some unique behaviors due in part to her growing-up hearing impaired and her outsider status in the group. She can seem aloof and distant at times but has a sweet nature. From the very beginning, Kumbuka was always given the choice to be near the infant. She certainly enjoys her time in the large gorilla yard on pretty days but will often come over to watch the keeper when her daughter is brought outside for some sunshine.

Gorillas in the wild are extraordinarily social creatures. Their status as a group is determined in part by the numbers and ages of their group members. Like most human clubs, diversity is the key to a stronger group. This holds true for the Zoo's extended gorilla family. Females cherish their

rank as mothers and silverbacks derive much of their self-worth from the number of females and offspring over whom they preside and protect.

Together, the Zoo's gorillas and their caregivers continue their amazing journey forward. Each step brings baby, mother and troop closer to full integration and compatibility. Staff are readying Gandai for her first direct contact with her mom since her birth, and Kumbuka is being prepared to care for her daughter who's quickly transforming from sedate infant to rambunctious toddler. Stay tuned!

[Dropbox link to pictures and video of Gandai with the troop.](#)

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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](http://jacksonvillezoo.org).