



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

Reaching Gorilla Infant Milestones Big Gains for Gandai and her Dedicated Caregivers

January 25, 2019-- *Jacksonville, FL* – Dedicated gorilla keepers at Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens have spent the last four months preparing Gandai for the time she can rejoin her mother Kumbuka and the rest of the Western lowland gorilla troop. Before the infant can be reintroduced, she needs to achieve specific milestones including walking, taking a bottle through mesh, the ability to hold on when being carried, and various developmental criteria. Keepers are proud to say Gandai has been making great strides in reaching these goals.

Gandai's keepers have taken turns providing around-the-clock care since the decision was made to remove her from the troop out of concern for her safety due to the way Kumbuka was carrying her. Kumbuka, a 22-year-old deaf gorilla who has been at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens since 2014, sadly lost two infants at another zoo. It is suspected her hearing loss may have prevented her from noticing the infants' distress calls.

While assistance-rearing the young gorilla, keepers have not just cared for Gandai like a mother would but have also focused on getting her to a point where she return to her mother. It has been both a demanding and rewarding journey.

To get little Gandai strong, and to teach her all the things a gorilla would need to know to fit in with the Zoo's troop, the keepers and Gandai went through what is affectionately being called "baby boot camp." Zoo staff was initially concerned with Gandai's gripping ability in her right hand, so strength conditioning was a priority. Gandai will need to be able to both position herself on Kumbuka when be carried and to right herself when being held or sitting.

It is crucially important that Gandai be able to navigate her habitat by herself. She will need to be able to come when called to take supplemental bottles and feedings. Most parents will relate when the keepers express their excitement as Gandai is nearly phased-out of overnight bottles. She has been taught to take a bottle through the mesh barrier that separates the troop from keeper staff. Additionally, Gandai has been introduced to soft solid foods and is thoroughly enjoying banana, steamed sweet potatoes and cooked broccoli.

At 10 pounds and with a mouth full of teeth, Gandai is a feisty little primate who is known to pinch or nibble like a human infant would. Her keepers have been both teaching her gorilla manners and practicing healthy play with her. She enjoys playing with a mirror toy and tummy tickle time. These are ways keepers have been filling the role of mother while they have been caring for Gandai.

Now that Gandai has been reaching these benchmarks, the Zoo is planning for the reunion with Kumbuka and the troop within the next several months. Gandai has been raised in close

proximity to her group since her birth in September. The goal remains to have Gandai and Kumbuka reunited as that would be the very best outcome for both. Female gorillas gain their status in a group through motherhood. The Zoo has conferred with institutions experienced in assistance-rearing and for alternative plans should Kumbuka be unable to care for her infant.

Until Gandai is ready for the exciting next developmental step to join her family, she'll be working on mastering actual physical steps with her with her devoted keepers.

[Dropbox link to photos 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.