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YOGURT, APPLESAUCE, SMASHED BANANA AND...ULTRASOUNDS? JACKSONVILLE ZOO AND GARDENS CONTRIBUTES TO THE GREAT APE HEART PROJECT

February 19, 2016 – *Jacksonville, FL* – The month of February is known as American Heart Month and Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG), along with many other facilities, participates in an exciting initiative called the Great Ape Heart Project.

Just like their human counterparts, heart disease is a major concern in the four species of great apes in human care – western lowland gorillas, orangutans, chimpanzees and bonobos.

The project collects and stores information in a centralized database allowing veterinarians and other zoo professionals to analyze heart data and improve communication and knowledge among zoos, research facilities and sanctuaries that have apes in their care.

JZG has participated in the Great Ape Heart Project for several years, contributing information learned during gorilla and bonobo cardiac exams performed under anesthesia. Lash, a western lowland gorilla and Akili, a bonobo, are currently treated for cardiac disease and are carefully monitored for progress.

According to Tracy Fenn, Supervisor of Mammals at JZG, "Most of our apes are trained for 'awake' ultrasounds and new equipment will allow us to start getting quality images helping us detect and monitor heart disease." Early detection is crucial for treating heart disease in apes, and awake and cooperative ultrasounds with each animal are a valuable tool in helping detect those early signs of heart problems.

Because ultrasound probes are costly, ape trainers use similarly sized PVC pipes with caps during the initial training process. This familiarizes the animals with the sensation of the probe and gels used during the ultrasounds. Some of the apes

at JZG aren't a fan of the gel, but instead prefer a substitute like yogurt, smashed banana or applesauce because they can have a yummy snack afterward.

JZG's participation in the Great Ape Heart Project not only helps the apes living at our Zoo lead healthy lives, but the information collected during the ultrasounds helps detect and treat early signs of heart disease in other apes, leading to longer, healthier lives.

You can find more information on the Great Ape Heart Project at greatapeheartproject.org.

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 an accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. For more information, visit jacksonvillezoo.org.