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African Elephant Safely Returned to Enclosure After Brief Stroll into Back Barn Courtyard

June 17, 2018-- *Jacksonville, FL* – At 12:20 p.m., male African Elephant, Ali, at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens (JZG) briefly wandered from his enclosure through an open gate into a contained courtyard behind the giraffe and elephant night-house. He was quickly returned and secured into holding enclosure. There were no guests, staff or animals, including Ali, injured during the incident.

The incident was a result of human error and the elephant keepers immediately realized Ali was not in his holding yard and called a "code-red as per procedures. While no guests were in danger, anytime an animal is not where they are supposed to be, established safety protocols go into effect.

All traffic traveling near the elephant building, was stopped including the trains which were on the far side of the Zoo. Elephant keepers were able to quickly and safely lead Ali back to his enclosure using techniques practiced at all AZA accredited facilities. Daily training sessions zoo keepers conduct with the animals in their care reinforce the relationship that allowed keepers to encourage the big guy back to his area with nothing but verbal commands, hay and browse.

Ali came to the Zoo in 1997 from Michael Jackson's Neverland Ranch. He is estimated to be 28-years-old and is an extremely good-natured bull elephant. Ali shares his habitat with two older females named Sheena and Thandi. The females were in the large yard that the public can view while Ali was in the private yard in the rear of the night-house. In the rear yard, Ali has larger enrichment items to play with and gets private feedings away from the rest of the herd.

"We perform animal escape drills so that our team can practice for just this sort of occasion," said Tony Vecchio, executive director of the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. "I'm proud to say our staff did exactly what they were supposed to and everything was resolved quickly."

As soon as Ali was safely returned to his holding yard, the Zoo resumed normal operation including the trains that pass along the back of the giraffe and elephant barn.

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.