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ZOO FAMILY MOURNS DEATH OF OLDEST MALE BONOBO, AKILI

March 29, 2016 – *Jacksonville, FL* – On Wednesday, March 23, Akili, Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' (JZG) oldest male bonobo passed away from cardiac arrest.

Just like many humans, Akili was being treated for heart disease a common affliction in Great Apes. He was anesthetized for a recheck exam on Wednesday last week to assess his condition, when he went into cardiac arrest and could not be revived despite extensive efforts, including CPR.

Akili was a beloved member of the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens family. Born at Yerkes National Primate Research Center in 1980, he would have turned 36 in July. After living at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park, Akili came to JZG in 2008 to become the primary breeding male of the Zoo's bonobo group. At 35 ½ years old, he is survived by his six offspring and five grand-offspring, including Lukuru, the youngest bonobo currently at the Zoo born in November 2014. It is also likely he is the father of the baby that bonobo Kuni is expected to deliver in August.

"The loss of any animal is difficult," said Tracy Fenn, Supervisor of Mammals at JZG. "Akili was very special to many humans and bonobos alike and is deeply missed. We are proud of his legacy and the contributions he made to the sustainability of his species through the Bonobo Species Survival Plan (SSP)."

The data collected during Akili's previous heart exams are included in a database managed by the Great Ape Heart Project, who were consulting via Skype during the Wednesday exam. The project seeks to better understand and treat heart disease of all Great Apes in human care through the information collected during heart exams.

'Great Ape' is a classification which includes bonobos, gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans. Formerly known as the pygmy chimpanzee, bonobos are found south of the Congo River in the dense rainforests of the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa. Bonobos form matriarchal societies where females lead the group.

JZG supports the Bonobo Conservation and Biodiversity Initiative in the Democratic Republic of Congo that helps ensure the protection of endangered bonobos in the wild by surveying populations, educating the local communities and providing training, technical and material support for park guards and anti-poaching activities.

JZG appreciates the thoughts and condolences from the Jacksonville community.

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