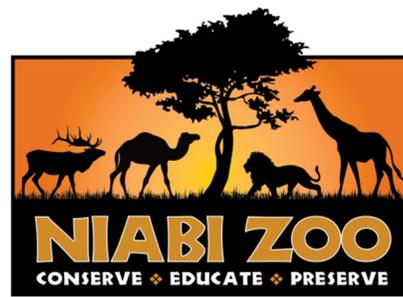


News Release
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Group of aging animals are ambassadors for their species, providing unique educational opportunities
Niabi says goodbye to Jackson the jaguar after 21 years

Coal Valley, Ill. (March 16, 2016) . Elderly animals who live at Niabi Zoo are providing unique educational opportunities to zoo caretakers, veterinarians and visitors alike.

Many animals . both large and small . have outlived their expected survival rates in the wild due to the high quality of care they are receiving at zoos like Niabi.

Over the course of their long lives, these elderly animals have had a huge impact on all visitors who have had a chance to view them, the vets who have cared for them and the trainers who have been by their side on a daily basis, said Dan Meates, interim zoo director at Niabi Zoo. They have become ambassadors for their species and their long lives have resulted in tremendous educational value and for that we are very thankful.

Niabi's aging animals include 21-year-old Mufasa the lion. There are also two Cotton Top Tamarins . Eddie will celebrate his 15th birthday this year and Goose will turn 14. Finally, there is a mare zebra, Molly, who is turning 33 this year. All of these animals have already outlived their average lifespan in the wild.

Niabi Zoo is not unique in the care for these types of aging animals. The population of geriatric animals is increasing, largely a result of improving care for animals in mainstream zoos and aquariums across the country. This does not come without its challenges.

At Niabi, zoo veterinarians and keeper staff work together, developing innovative ways to make sure the animals have a great quality of life throughout their golden years.

Among these tactics is a highly extensive annual exam that allows the zoo to closely monitor the animal and detect changes. In addition, Niabi caretakers conduct daily husbandry training with the animals, looking at both animals up close, monitoring weight and posture and detecting any potential problems. The zoo's veterinary team also examines all the elderly animals three times per week to monitor appetite and ongoing health concerns, and to check for any changes in behavior that could be cause for alarm.

As animals age their medical needs may increase, and our keeper team, who know these animals very well, are trained to notice subtle differences in behavior, said Meates. This allows us to detect any signs of aging that might become problems and immediately address them and helps us maintain the best possible quality of life.

While the aging animals are largely in good health, many are struggling with symptoms that are similar to those of older humans. Many have declining vision and hearing, arthritis and some are experiencing loss of appetite.

Mufasa, a lion born at Niabi, is 21 years old this year. His life expectancy in the wild would have expired six or seven years ago. His eyes are fogging with cataracts, and his appetite is waning. He moves more slowly than before, and he shows little interest in going outdoors.

To address these issues, Jessica Lench Porter, the cat's primary keeper, works with Mufasa on a daily basis. In addition to monitoring his health, she challenges him with different types of enrichment activities to provide mental stimulation and to help increase natural behaviors.

One of the enrichment items involves bottles with different scents that are hidden inside his enclosure. This changes up the smell of the environment and provides the mental stimulations that is so important to quality of life.

One way for zoo visitors to learn more about the zoo's aging animals, as well as the other animals at the Zoo is to attend a Zookeeper Chat. Keeper talks give visitors an opportunity to interact directly with the individuals who take care of the animals. Presentations take place seven days a week at noon and 3 p.m.

Niabi Zoo says goodbye to Jackson the jaguar

One of Niabi Zoo's big cats, Jackson the jaguar, has died after living 21 long and happy years. Jackson was euthanized the week of March 14 by the zoo's vet staff.

Because of his age, Jackson had undergone treatment for multiple medical conditions, including signs of arthritis and early onset of kidney failure, which was noticed during his last physical exam. Jackson's keepers recently noticed a rapid decline in health, so an exam was scheduled to determine his quality of life.

Jackson was a valuable part of the zoo family, which was lucky to enjoy the presence of this playful cat since his arrival in 1995. Jaguars in the wild typically live up to 12 or 15 years.

Jackson lived a very long life and was a great ambassador for his species, said Dan Meates, interim director of Niabi Zoo. He was a strikingly beautiful cat who was very charismatic. He has touched thousands of lives and inspired many to learn more about how to protect endangered cats. We will miss him dearly. We'd love to hear visitors' favorite stories or memories of Jackson on our Facebook page.

Carnivore keeper Jessica Lench Porter was Jackson's primary caretaker and was intimately familiar with his key personality traits and behaviors. She knew what he liked and disliked, and what his favorite toy was: a homemade ball made from a wound-up fire hose.

By learning the ways different animals act on a regular basis, we are able to notice when things are out of the ordinary, said Porter.

Husbandry training programs play a big role in this. The daily training session Porter had with Jackson allowed her to recognize subtle difference in behavior that might represent something being wrong. For example, she could ask Jackson to present a certain area of his body so she could safely inspect it visually. Jackson was also trained to voluntarily present his side for injections. This gave Porter the insights needed to provide the best care imaginable to Jackson. He also had a favorite toy: a homemade ball made from a wound-up fire hose.

As Jackson and other animals at Niabi Zoo enter the later stages of their lives, the zookeepers personalize care so the animals can stay comfortable physically and stimulated mentally.

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About Niabi Zoo

Niabi Zoo offers an opportunity to explore more than 40 acres of animal exhibit, including over 330 animals in more than 140 species from around the world. The zoo places great emphasis on educating both children and adults about the importance of conservation. Their educational center is an important part of their mission to connect the community with the natural world through conservation leadership and engaging educational experiences. Niabi Zoo strives to instill a sense of care and understanding for wild animals in each and every visitor as they work in the community.

Niabi Zoo opens April 11th for the 2016 season. For more information about the zoo, visit NiabiZoo.com.