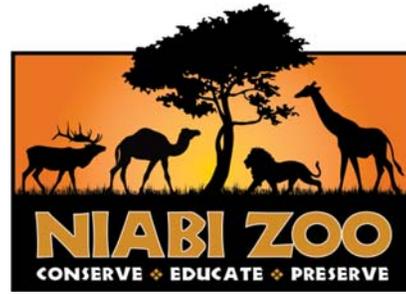


News Release
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Niabi Zoo welcomes new Amur leopard as it prepares to say goodbye of Mufasa, the lion

Coal Valley, Ill. (March 22, 2016) – The Niabi Zoo family has welcomed a young Amur leopard named Zeke to its pack of big cats. Zeke is a one-year-old leopard that was born at the Potawatomi zoo in South Bend, Indiana, and will be part of the Niabi experience when the zoo opens its doors April 11, 2016.

The Amur leopard is a critically endangered species. Only 50 to 60 leopards remain in Land of the Leopard National Park near Vladivostok, Russia, and approximately 10 to 20 have been counted in adjacent areas of China.

“While people typically think of leopards as living in the savannas of Africa, the Amur leopard is native to the Russian Far East,” said Dan Meates, interim director at Niabi Zoo. “Roughly 60 to 70 Amur leopards are left in the wild, and we’re incredibly lucky to have Zeke here with us at Niabi. He’ll help us raise awareness of the species and its survival challenges in the wild.”

Similar to other leopards, the Amur leopard can run at speeds of up to 37 miles per hour. This incredible animal has been reported to leap more than 19 feet horizontally and up to 10 feet vertically. Apart from its long winter coat, the Amur leopard is easily told apart from other leopard subspecies by its widely spaced rose-like markings with thick borders. It also has longer legs, probably an adaptation for walking through snow.

Zeke’s arrival will bolster the big cat pack at Niabi, which recently lost Jackson, the jaguar, and sadly may also soon be saying farewell to Mufasa, the lion.

Mufasa, an African lion, was born and raised at Niabi and is 21 years old this year. He has become an icon at the zoo and has far outlived his life expectancy in the wild, which is typically around 14-15 years.

“We are watching Mufasa very closely,” said Meates. “He has suffered from a number of conditions that are common to big cats of this age, including decreasing vision and appetite. Our daily check-ups have indicated that these conditions are become more severe and may start to impact his quality of life.”

Jessica Lench Porter, Mufasa’s primary keeper, continues to work with him on a daily basis. The ongoing training gives her an opportunity to look at him up close, monitor weight and posture and allow her to detect any potential problems. The zoo’s veterinary team also examines Mufasa 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.

“Mufasa means a lot to visitors at the zoo,” said Meates. “He was born and raised here. He has lived an incredible life at Niabi and has played an extraordinarily important role in conservation efforts and raising awareness of his species among the public. He’s a very special animal.”

Mufasa is so important to the Niabi family and Quad Cities community that to honor him upon his passing the zoo is planning a Mufasa Memorial Banner.

“For a few weeks after his passing, we’ll have a banner up at the Zoo,” said Meates. “Every guest is welcome to write on the banner what Mufasa – and our mission to educate and preserve – means to them. Mufasa is more than a lion. He’s *the* community’s lion.”

For more information about Niabi, its exhibits and upcoming events, visit NiabiZoo.com.

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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.