



For Immediate Release

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BITTERSWEET LION UPDATE FROM ZOO ATLANTA

Birth and death a part of life in Zoo's lion pride

ATLANTA – June 24, 2008 – Dennis Kelly, President and CEO of Zoo Atlanta, announced today that Masai, an 18-year-old female African lion, passed away. Zoo Atlanta's animal management team had been treating the lioness's declining health since January 2008.

Remembered affectionately for her spirit and salty personality, the feisty big cat had been in good health until she began to suffer from what appeared to be an upper respiratory infection earlier this year. While treatment had been successful to the extent that Masai's respiratory symptoms cleared, follow-up exams indicated that she had developed severe anemia.

"Our veterinary and animal management team worked diligently to ensure that Masai received the best care and treatment possible," said Kelly. "We will miss her here at Zoo Atlanta."

Masai's passing is a bittersweet reminder of the natural cycle defining the lives of all zoological institutions. The elder lioness's passing occurred just weeks after the Zoo's announcement that 5-year-old female Kiki had given birth to her first litter of cubs. The three male cubs, healthy and thriving at 3 weeks old, continue to do well in their mother's care. Zoo Atlanta's animal management team anticipates that the new arrivals will join Kiki on exhibit when they are between 7 and 12 weeks old.

Masai was one of three lions born on June 3, 1990, at the Chipangali Wildlife Trust, a wildlife orphanage in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe. She and two males, Bantu and Zulu, were donated to the Riverbanks Zoo in Columbia, S.C., later that year. Masai joined the Zoo Atlanta family on October 16, 2003. While she did not reproduce at Zoo Atlanta, she gave birth twice at Riverbanks Zoo (a single cub born in April 1993 and a litter of two in August 1993). The lioness's nearly five years in Atlanta were spent in an enriching environment in Zoo Atlanta's African Plains, and her long, full life is a testament to the expert professional care she received during her 18 years.

At 18 Masai was considered a geriatric animal for her species. Lions typically live 14 to 18 years in the wild and up to 20 years in zoological situations. Detailed necropsy results will be available in the next few weeks.

Zoo Atlanta houses three other adult African lions – males Farasi, 18, and Kamau, 3, and female Kiki, 5.

About Zoo Atlanta

An accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Zoo Atlanta inspires value and preservation of wildlife through a unique mix of education and an outdoor family experience. From well-known native wildlife to critically endangered species on the brink of extinction, the Zoo offers memorable close encounters with more than 800 animals from around the world. One of only four zoos in the U.S. exhibiting giant pandas, Zoo Atlanta is also home to one of the nation's most recognized collections of great apes and is a global center of excellence in the care and reproduction of vanishing amphibians and reptiles. Zoo Atlanta is open daily with the exceptions of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Keeper talks, interactive wildlife shows, education programs and special events run year-round. For more information, call 404.624.WILD or visit zooatlanta.org.

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