

**Press Release**

**For Immediate Release**

**Date:** Tuesday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008

**For More Information**

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## **THE TORONTO ZOO MAKES CHALLENGING SURGICAL ATTEMPT TO SAVE AILING WHITE RHINO**

**Tuesday, September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Toronto, Ontario:** Toronto Zoo announced today the passing of 'Yekisamga,' fondly known as 'Yeki,' a 25-year-old male White Rhino. On Thursday, September 4<sup>th</sup> concerned animal care staff observed Yeki exhibiting signs of ill health, which was later diagnosed to be 'colic,' a condition commonly found in horses in which a blockage occurs, rendering the animal unable to defecate. After numerous attempts at hydrating the rhino, Toronto Zoo veterinary and Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) staff made the decision to proceed with a challenging surgery in an attempt to remove the obstruction.

On Tuesday September 9<sup>th</sup>, Toronto Zoo veterinarians and OVC surgeons and anesthesiologists performed a ventral abdominal procedure on Yeki, with the assistance of numerous students, Toronto Zoo animal care staff and Toronto Fire Services. The challenging procedure lasted 10 hours in total, taking place from 2:00pm to 12:00am, followed by 24 hour monitoring and treatment. The procedure consisted of examining the intestine, searching for the obstruction, removing material from the colon, checking the remainder of his intestinal system and then stitching him back up. In spite of all the efforts put forth, Yeki passed away due to complications on Thursday September 11<sup>th</sup> at 2:00am.

Before the procedure could even be considered, many different elements needed to be arranged. An operating room had to be created under unusual conditions at the animal's exhibit due to logistics and time constraints. Toronto Fire Services were an important component in creating this environment, donating their time, efforts and equipment to assist with the lengthy surgery. They provided an apparatus to ensure proper positioning of the rhino before and after surgery. The procedure could not have taken place without their support and assistance.

"The valiant team effort that took place to do everything possible to help Yeki is unbelievable, to say the least. The sense of team work that surrounded the entire procedure from start to finish gives me shivers. I am so proud and honoured to have been part of this miraculous life-saving attempt for this incredible animal," Maria Franke, Curator of Mammals, Toronto Zoo.

Arriving in Toronto from Granby Zoo in 2001, Yeki quickly became a rhino that stood apart from the rest. "He was a lively and energetic animal, a pleasure for keepers to work with and a favourite for tour groups to visit. The keeping staff also found him entertaining to watch; we would often catch him shadow-boxing and mock charging while out in the paddock. Yeki will be deeply missed by all his human and animal friends," says Harry Hoffauer, Senior Keeper of African Savanna.

The White Rhinoceros is one of the five species of rhinoceros that still exist in the wild. White Rhinos are found in grassland and savannah habitat in Africa. They are listed as Near Threatened on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species™, but one of its two subspecies, the Northern white rhino, is listed as Critically Endangered and is on the brink of extinction. Currently there are approximately 11,300 white rhinos that are living in the wild (World Association of Zoos and Aquariums). In North America, there are 220 white rhinos in captivity (2005 International Stud Book), and the Toronto Zoo is currently home to one female white rhino. The Toronto Zoo participates in a Species Survival Plan (SSP) for rhinos and works continuously to improve rhino care in captivity, with current research projects including a study of reproductive cycles and artificial insemination in rhinos.

**Current Zoo Hours and Admission Prices – Please note our hours have changed:**

Zoo Hours until Oct. 13<sup>th</sup> – 9am to 6pm. Oct. 14<sup>th</sup> to Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>: 9:30am to 4:30pm. Last admissions one hour before closing. General Admission 13-64 incl. is \$20, Children 3 and under are free, Children 4-12 are \$12 and Seniors 65+ are \$14. Parking is \$8. **Events and admission prices are subject to change without notice.** The Zoo is located at Meadowvale Road and Hwy. 401, Exit 389 east and west bound. For general information, call (416) 392-5929. The Toronto Zoo is open year round (except December 25<sup>th</sup>). [torontozoo.com](http://torontozoo.com)