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ZOO KNOXVILLE ELEPHANTS MOVING TO AZA PARTNER THE ELEPHANT SANCTUARY IN TENNESSEE

Move assures continued companionship as all three enter late stage of life.

Knoxville, Tenn. (August 22, 2022) – Zoo Knoxville announced today that African elephants Tonka, Jana, and Edie will be moving to The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, located in Hohenwald, Tennessee. Zoo Knoxville and The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee are both accredited members of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), assuring the continuation of the highest standard of care for them. The move will allow them to join a larger group of elephants, ensuring companionship for the three aging elephants as they enter the late stages of their lives.

Elephants have complex social needs and thrive with companionship. All three of Zoo Knoxville’s elephants are senior citizens by elephant standards. Realizing that Knoxville’s herd will be facing inevitable losses in the near future, Zoo Knoxville began exploring options to ensure their social needs would be met for the remainder of their lives.

Zoo Knoxville made the decision to transfer them to the care of their AZA colleagues at The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee after carefully considering what is needed for their wellbeing at this stage of their lives. This decision is supported by the Louisville Zoo, who loaned Jana to the care of Zoo Knoxville in 1998. In addition to the high standard of care that is assured at an AZA-accredited facility, continuity of veterinary care in close consultation with U.T. College of Veterinary Medicine, the range of companionship they can provide and the short amount of travel required for the move were decisive factors.

African elephants have a long legacy at Zoo Knoxville. In 1963, the Ringling Brothers Circus unexpectedly donated a bull elephant named Old Diamond to the zoo. The community rallied and raised funds to build a home for him, and in 1978 the zoo welcomed the first two African elephants to be born in the Western Hemisphere. Zoo Knoxville remains committed to that legacy. The Zoo will be launching a new master plan soon that includes a vision for the future of elephants in Knoxville with the support of the community.

“Tonka, Jana and Edie are beloved and treasured, and we will always put their wellbeing and happiness first,” said Lisa New, Zoo Knoxville president and CEO. “Part of caring for each animal entrusted to us is having a life plan from birth to end of life. We are at the stage of that plan when we must now ensure our elephants are in an environment that allows them the social interactions they need as their long-time companions near the end of their lives. It is a decision we did not take lightly, but we know ultimately it is the right one.”

The moves will not be immediate. The timeline for the moves is dependent ultimately on the elephants themselves. Zoo Knoxville’s expert elephant caretakers will begin training Jana, Edie, and Tonka to voluntarily enter and stand in a travel crate with positive reinforcement. When they are comfortable with this routine, females Jana and Edie will make the move first accompanied by their care staff and veterinarians and be followed later in 2023 by male Tonka. Zoo Knoxville will keep the community up to date on their departure so there is time to wish them farewell.

About Zoo Knoxville

Zoo Knoxville is a nonprofit entity situated on 53 wooded acres just east of downtown Knoxville. Zoo Knoxville features exhibits of wild animals in natural habitats and is world renowned for its efforts in conservation and species survival. Zoo Knoxville is nationally accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and is committed to the highest standards in animal care and well-being, ethics, conservation, and education. Knoxville's largest attraction, the zoo is open every day except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Currently, the zoo is open daily from 9:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m., with extended hours each Thursday. Admission and ticket sales stop one-hour before the zoo closes. For more information visit zooknoxville.org.

About The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee

Located on 3,060 acres in Hohenwald, Tennessee, The Elephant Sanctuary is the nation's largest natural-habitat refuge developed specifically for Asian and African elephants. Founded in 1995, The Sanctuary has provided 28 elephants with individualized care, the companionship of a herd, and the opportunity to live out their lives in a safe haven dedicated to their well-being. The Sanctuary is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, and has been dually recognized through certification by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and accreditation by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries.

To learn more about The Elephant Sanctuary in Tennessee, please visit our website at www.elephants.com. We welcome you to stay engaged and observe the elephants via our live-streaming EleCams at www.elephants.com/elecams, and connect with us via social media.

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