

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Brevard Zoo Says Goodbye to longtime Zoo Resident Rafiki

MELBOURNE, Fla., September 12, 2023 — Brevard Zoo is heartbroken to share that Rafiki, one of our original five giraffes to be on habitat when Expedition Africa opened in 2003, was humanely euthanized Sunday, September 10, following ongoing age-related medical issues. Rafiki was 25 years old, and he spent most of his life delighting our Zoo community with his “larger than a giraffe” personality.

“Rafiki was the first animal to arrive at the Zoo for Africa, and he walked off the trailer ready to make his mark capturing the hearts of everyone he came across,” said Jon Brangan, Deputy Director of Brevard Zoo. “His magnetic personality never wavered, bringing joy to our staff, volunteers and thousands of visiting guests for nearly 20 years. He will be profoundly missed by our Zoo family and our entire community.”

At 25 years old, Rafiki’s age was exceptional for male giraffes, whose [median lifespan](#) is about 15.9 years old in Association of Zoos and Aquariums-accredited facilities. His long life with us is a testament to the innovative care provided by our veterinary staff and his keepers.

Rafiki made fewer public appearances at the Zoo’s giraffe feeding platform these last few years, largely due to his arthritis. Needless to say, he relished his one-on-one time with his keepers in the Africa barn when not on habitat. To keep him comfortable, our animal care team ensured Rafiki had regular [hoof trims](#), chiropractic sessions, acupuncture, [laser therapy](#), medication. He [recently received a pair of shoes for his feet last week](#). Recently he began losing his appetite and we started hospice care, which included an increase in pain medication to keep him comfortable and daily quality of life assessments.

Unfortunately, Rafiki’s condition and quality of life worsened over the weekend. The Zoo’s veterinary and animal care team decided that euthanasia was the most compassionate choice for him. Rafiki was surrounded by some of the keepers who have cared for him and loved him over the years.

A memorial area is available near the front entrance of the Zoo for guests to share special memories of Rafiki, bring their favorite photos of him or write us a message.

His legacy will continue at Brevard Zoo, where his 2-year-old son Mapenzi will remain to become our new breeding male giraffe. Rafiki sired more than 12 calves while at our Zoo with our giraffe matriarchs, Milenna and Johari. His legacy is felt throughout fellow Association of Zoos and Aquariums facilities where his offspring reside – Rafiki even has a great grandcalf.

“There is no doubt his legacy will live on, in his descendants, in our keepers, in our guests and volunteers, and in the amazing care we provide to all our animals,” said Africa Platform keeper Alyssa Simon. “He will be greatly missed.”

Rafiki was one of our first giraffes to participate in voluntary hoof trims and other care, contributing to how our Zoo cares for giraffes, Alyssa said. He helped our animal care team learn new skills to provide supportive care for older giraffes and preventative care for our younger ones.

Rafiki was well-known for peeking out to greet his keepers each morning, and even following around Africa keepers like Vanessa Kunz while in the Africa Barn.

“Walking into the barn will never feel the same without him there but I will always cherish all the memories I have with him,” Vanessa said.

Some of Vanessa’s favorite memories include giving him head scratches and treats – there’s not much Rafiki wouldn’t do for one more rye cracker! “I have had an amazing relationship with Rafiki, Vanessa said. “I felt he trusted me fully. I feel so blessed to have worked with him all these years.”

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Brevard Zoo is home to more than 900 animals representing 195 species from all over the world. As a not-for-profit organization, it is a leader in the fields of animal wellness, education and conservation. More information is available at www.brevardzoo.org.

Treetop Trek features five aerial obstacle courses that whisk guests above parts of the Zoo and through lush Florida landscapes. More information is available at www.treetoptrek.com.