



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 21, 2014

MEDIA CONTACT:

Kelly Thompson

Marketing & Development Coordinator

Office: 325-437-4692

E-mail: kelly.thompson@abilenetx.com

Zoo Opens Special Summer Exhibit: Ghost of the Bayou

ABILENE, TEXAS – A rare albino alligator will be on exhibit this summer at the Abilene Zoo, arriving just in time for Memorial Day weekend.

“This is a special opportunity for our zoo guests,” says Bill Gersonde, executive director of the Abilene Zoo. “These animals cannot survive in the wild, and this is a terrific chance for people to see an unusual animal and learn about the remarkable history of all American alligators, which once were listed as an endangered species.”

The alligator is on loan from St. Augustine Alligator Farm in St. Augustine, Florida, a fellow Association of Zoos and Aquariums accredited institution. The six-foot-long reptile, a female named Jenny, will be on exhibit from May 23 through Sept. 8. Community underwriters made the event possible.

When an animal is born or hatched without skin pigment known as melanin, it appears white with pink color showing through in the eyes. This pink color is visible because of the blood vessels behind the iris. Another rare form of white alligators lack only certain pigments and may be white with blue eyes. The Abilene Zoo will be exhibiting a true albino white alligator.

Because of this lack of melanin, albino alligators cannot laze around outside sunbathing, as zoo guests are accustomed to seeing “Albert,” do. Albert is the same species as Jenny, an American alligator, and he is beloved as the Abilene Zoo’s longest resident, an animal that adult guests often remember from their own childhood visits to the park.

To protect her from sunburn, the albino alligator will stay in a custom-built exhibit space in the newly remodeled Reptile House. She also will be provided with vitamin D3 in her diet of fish, chicken and red meat.

The American alligator is a wonderful conservation success story, Gersonde explained, recovering from being over-hunted to near extinction then listed on the Endangered Species List in 1967. Thanks to great efforts, such as state regulations and hunters’ efforts to control

hunting, the alligators became a success again and were removed from the Endangered Species list in 1987.

White American Alligators were originally found in the wild of Louisiana in 1986 when surveyors discovered a newly hatched clutch of baby alligators that were totally white. Natural predators eat baby alligators, so the young naturally green colored babies have excellent camouflage to protect themselves. White alligators shine like a beacon to predators at night. People believe that they usually die within 24 hours.

The Abilene Zoo is home to more than 900 animals from 250 species. The Abilene Zoo is open 7 days a week (closed Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day) from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Last admittance is 4:30 p.m. Tickets are \$6 for adults, \$3.50 for children ages 3-12, \$5 for seniors aged 60+. Members are admitted free. Memberships start at \$30. www.abilenezoo.org. 325-676-6085.

*Starting June 5, the zoo will be open every Thursday until 9 p.m., with admission ending at 8:30 p.m.