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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Zoo to open long-awaited Giraffe Safari**

ABILENE, TEXAS – The Abilene Zoo will open the new \$3.8 million, multispecies Giraffe Safari exhibit Saturday, April 23, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony at 10 a.m.

“Feeding giraffe is among our visitors’ most memorable experiences,” said Executive Director Bill Gersonde. “We think people will embrace the new setting. It’s healthier for the animals and more fun for the guests.”

The opening day festivities will include African dance groups performing from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Wylie ISD students also will set up conservation presentations throughout the grounds in honor of Earth Day weekend.

Guests will be able to hand-feed romaine lettuce to the zoo’s giraffe herd at eye level from a raised feeding deck, dubbed the Twiga Terrace. “Twiga” means giraffe is Swahili. Giraffe encounters will be sold for \$4 at the new facility.

Giraffe Safari doubles the space of the giraffes’ old habitat – for a total of 30,400 square feet. The new landscape gives the animals more room to roam and display behaviors seen in the wild. The layout design features the latest in safety and care standards for the animals and will allow for a breeding program for the endangered species.

The zoo also has added to the herd, bringing the number of giraffe at the zoo up to six: four adult females, an adult male, and a young male calf.

Other African animals also are featured in the exhibit, including Aldabra tortoises, red river hogs, a new colobus group, small antelope called blue duikers, and large birds called kori bustards. Helmeted guineas and Marabou storks graze among the giraffe.

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Since its founding in 1966, the Abilene Zoo has stood as a place of learning and adventure, where local families and visitors make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife. Situated on 16 acres in the award-winning Grover Nelson Park, the zoo provides a special encounter in a lushly landscaped walkable setting with more than 1000 animals of 270 species from around the globe. The zoo serves more than 225,000 visitors per year, and offers VIP behind-the-scenes tours, as well as popular classes, camps and after-hours family events. The 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 p.m. Tickets are \$7 for adults, \$4.50 for children ages 3-12, \$6 for seniors aged 60 and older. Members are admitted free. [www.abilenezoo.org](http://www.abilenezoo.org). 325-676-6085.

**Mission Statement:** *The Abilene Zoo is a place of learning and adventure, where families make memories, share the joy of discovery and become inspired to preserve wildlife.*