



ASSOCIATION  
OF ZOOS &  
AQUARIUMS &

SAFE  
SAVING ANIMALS  
FROM EXTINCTION

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**[FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**MEDIA CONTACT:**

Contact: Kelly Thompson

Marketing & Development Coordinator, Abilene Zoo

Office: 325-437-4692

E-mail: [kelly.thompson@abilenetx.com](mailto:kelly.thompson@abilenetx.com)

## Endangered Species “Vanishing” at the Abilene Zoo

*The “vanishing” animals are part of a national effort to highlight the growing extinction crisis.*

ABILENE, TEXAS – May 15, 2015 – Today is the 10th Anniversary of Endangered Species Day, and to highlight the growing importance of working on saving endangered species from extinction, The Abilene Zoo will have an endangered animal “vanish” from his exhibit.

“Let’s face it. If there were no more black rhinos left on our planet, that would be an awful situation to find ourselves in,” said Abilene Zoo Executive Director Bill Gersonde. “Thankfully, we are not in that situation and, in fact, we are in a position to do something about it. That is why today, we are asking our visitors to pause and consider what extinction looks and feels like in a collaborative effort to motivate and inspire them to join your zoo and other accredited zoos and aquariums in our efforts to save animals from extinction.”

The vanishing animal from the zoo are part of a larger, national effort organized by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, of which the Abilene Zoo is a member. Specifically, the 229-accredited members of the AZA are coming together in a variety of ways to help the public consider what it would be like to not be able to see, learn from or connect with these incredible animals again. This is to

raise awareness of the efforts to save animals from extinction and to help launch AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction (SAFE).

For decades, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums have been leaders in species survival, and are already working to restore more than 30 species to healthy wild populations, including the American bison, the California condor and a variety of aquatic species.

Through SAFE, AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums will convene scientists and stakeholders globally to identify the factors threatening species, develop Conservation Action Plans, collect new resources and engage the public.

In 2015, SAFE will focus on 10 species and then add an additional 10 species each year for the next 10 years. The inaugural 10 species include: African penguin, Asian elephants, Black rhinoceros, cheetah, gorilla, sea turtles, vaquita, sharks and rays, Western pond turtle and Whooping Crane.

“AZA aquarium and zoo conservationists have identified more than 100 species facing the greatest threats and where accredited zoos and aquariums have unique conservation and science knowledge to contribute,” Jim Maddy, AZA President and CEO, said. “Today, we’re demonstrating just how profound the loss would be if we don’t take action now to protect wildlife. More importantly, we are also explaining to the public just what AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums are doing to save animals from extinction.”

The Abilene Zoo is involved with conservation efforts including breeding Maned Wolves and ocelots. Just last year, the Abilene Zoo sent one of the Black Rhinos in its collection to Fossil Rim Wildlife Center to participate in a breeding program.

### **Public Asked to Help Save Animals from Extinction**

One of the easiest conservation actions the public can take is to visit the zoo. Doing so directly supports the collaborative efforts of hundreds of researchers, field conservationists and scientists from AZA-accredited zoos and aquariums working to save animals from extinction.

To follow the online conversation on May 15 check out #savingspecies.

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### **About the Abilene Zoo:**

The Abilene Zoo is home to more than 900 animals of 250 different species. 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 \$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](http://www.abilenezoo.org). 325-676-6085. This summer, the zoo will be open every Thursday until 9 p.m.

**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.*

**About AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction**

AZA SAFE: Saving Animals From Extinction combines the power of zoo & aquarium visitors with the resources and collective expertise of zoos and aquariums accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and partners to save animals from extinction. Together we are working on saving the most vulnerable wildlife species from extinction and protecting them for future generations. To learn more, visit [AZAsavingspecies.org](http://AZAsavingspecies.org).