



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **GEMINA, CROOKED-NECKED GIRAFFE DIES AT AGE 21**

**Santa Barbara, CA, January 10, 2008** -- Gemina the “crooked-necked giraffe,” one of the Santa Barbara Zoo’s most recognizable and beloved animals, was humanely euthanized Wednesday, January 9.

“We observed a decline in her appetite over the past two weeks and she had stopped eating all together,” reports Alan Varsik, the Zoo’s Director of Animal Programs and Conservation. “The welfare of our animals is the number one concern here at the Santa Barbara Zoo and her declining condition appeared to affect her quality of life. We did everything we could but the time came when we had to make the humane decision. She was off exhibit in the giraffe barn when she died.”

A necropsy has been performed, though the results will not be available for several weeks. It is believed that her final ailment was not related to her neck condition. “Her demise is consistent with the challenges of old age,” notes Varsik.

“Though a few giraffes in captivity have been known to live into their late-twenties, reaching age 21 is considered an achievement,” said Rich Block, Zoo CEO & Director. “She was a great animal ambassador, showing that differences can be accepted and even celebrated. She will be missed.”

This popular animal recently celebrated her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in style with a serenade by Zoo Campers, a “giraffe-sized” birthday card, and a special treat of acacia, her favorite food. A humorous, Zoo-produced video about Gemina was created at that time and can be viewed on the Zoo’s webpage, [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org). The webpage also has a place for the public to post remembrances about Gemina and to make donations in her memory.

### **About Gemina**

Gemina was born July 16, 1986, at the San Diego Wild Animal Park to Ginger and Black Jack, who were both born at the San Diego Zoo. She has lived at the Santa Barbara Zoo since she

was approximately one year old. Her condition began around age three and has developed over the years, though the cause is unknown. She had been x-rayed and examined by the Zoo's veterinarian, but the findings were not conclusive.

“She received quality care throughout her entire life,” said Varsik. “Gemina led a very typical existence and was treated as a normal member of the herd. She did not appear to be in discomfort and exhibited normal giraffe behaviors.”

A generation of central California school children has grown up with Gemina and made her a popular local figure. Gemina was the only non-human in a list of internationally known Santa Barbara area figures that included Nobel laureates, and celebrities such as John Cleese, Oprah Winfrey and Brad Pitt in a 2006 Santa Barbara News-Press story.

“Why does that giraffe have a crooked neck?” was the most asked question at the Zoo for many years (asked more often than “where’s the bathroom?”). Gemina also acquired a number of national and local television appearances. In 2005, Gemina was featured in the television show “Miracle Workers” as the source of inspiration for a young boy with severe scoliosis. And, in 2007, Gemina was voted first in a list of “Seven Wonders of Santa Barbara” by residents on a local radio station poll.

### **Giraffes at the Santa Barbara Zoo**

The Zoo's giraffe herd remains on exhibit and is comprised of one male, Taru (aged 15), and two females: Sulima, aged 17; and Eritrea, aged seven. They are all Baringo (or Rothschild's) giraffes, which are found in Uganda and in western Kenya. There no plans to expand the herd at this time.

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