



## PRESS RELEASE

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# Santa Barbara Zoo's Elderly Masai Giraffe Michael Dies at Age 16

(February 16, 2023) Santa Barbara, CA – The [Santa Barbara Zoo](#) is deeply saddened to announce that Michael, the male Masai giraffe that lived at the Zoo for over 11 of his 16 years, was humanely euthanized on Wednesday, February 15, after battling a degenerative joint disease (arthritis). Michael's keepers and veterinary staff have been closely monitoring and treating Michael's age-related health issues for nearly a year. In recent weeks, despite their best efforts, the team saw a significant decline in his quality of life and made the difficult decision.

"For over 11 years Michael was Santa Barbara's tallest resident with an ocean view," shared Rich Block, President & CEO of the Santa Barbara Zoo. "Though he arrived at the Zoo in December 2011, the quest to bring Michael to Santa Barbara began two years earlier. That effort was rewarded as Michael quickly became a much beloved Zoo resident by the staff as well as by countless guests. He was a wonderful ambassador for giraffes and all animals. Michael's close encounters with guests touched countless lives and created life-long memories. He brought a lot of heart to our community."

At the age of 16, Michael was considered a geriatric giraffe. Staff were actively treating ongoing joint and hoof issues to help keep Michael mobile and comfortable. Soft surfaces were introduced into the giraffe habitat and barn to cushion Michael's aging joints, he received regular hoof trimming to help keep the bottom of his feet clean and correctly shaped, and was given inflammation and pain medications to keep him comfortable. These types of health issues are common in aging giraffes.

Considered to be the most genetically valuable male Masai giraffe in the Species Survival Plan, Michael played an important role in maintaining a healthy population for the species in institutions accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. He sired 11 calves during his lifetime, the most recent being Raymie, a male calf born in January 2022 who currently resides at Santa Barbara Zoo. The rest of his surviving offspring have moved on to other accredited zoos once they matured to carry on his legacy and join herds of their own.

"Michael has been an amazing animal to care for during his time at Santa Barbara Zoo," shared Dr. Julie Barnes, Vice President of Animal Care & Health of the Santa Barbara Zoo. "Although very large, he was so gentle and engaging, and he was an excellent father to his calves. He connected with thousands of visitors at the feeding deck, giving them the opportunity to marvel and appreciate this iconic and unique

species. Additionally, his contribution to the population by siring 11 calves has been vital to the genetic health and sustainability of the population, which is now endangered in the wild.”

Michael arrived in Santa Barbara in 2011 from Parc Safari in Quebec, Canada, and quickly became one of the Zoo’s most beloved animals. He had a large personality that mirrored his size, and delighted guests and caretakers for over a decade. The giraffe feeding deck in particular was one of his favorite activities, and he would usually immediately come over whenever he saw a person with lettuce in the area. Michael thrived at the Santa Barbara Zoo, leading an engaged and healthy life. He has been a fantastic ambassador for his species and counterparts in the wild.

Michael was a truly iconic giraffe who will be deeply missed by everyone in our Zoo community. The Zoo would like to extend a special thank you to all of the keepers and veterinary staff who devoted so much care, time, and effort over the years to give Michael a long and healthy life.

The Santa Barbara Zoo’s Masai giraffe herd now numbers three: Adia, Audrey, and Raymie, who was born in 2022. The giraffes at the Santa Barbara Zoo are among more than 120 Masai giraffes that live at 28 North American zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).

### **About the Santa Barbara Zoo**

The Santa Barbara Zoo is open daily from 9 a.m. for members and 9:30 a.m. for general admission until 5 p.m.; general admission is \$25 for adults, \$15 for children 2-12, and free for children under 2. Parking is \$11. The Santa Barbara Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). AZA zoos are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great visitor experience, and a better future for all living things. With more than 200 accredited members, AZA is a leader in global wildlife conservation and is the public’s link to helping animals in their native habitats. Visit [www.sbzoo.org](http://www.sbzoo.org).

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