



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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*Great Apes on the Move!*

## Audubon Zoo Saying Farewell to Pair of Critically Endangered Great Apes as Part of Plan to Preserve the Species

Casey, a male silverback gorilla, will move to Louisville Zoo and Berani, a male Sumatran orangutan, will leave for Denver Zoo.

(New Orleans, La.) - Two of Audubon Zoo's popular primates will be leaving New Orleans soon as part of a strategy forged with fellow accredited facilities of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) to maintain a healthy and genetically diverse population of gorillas and orangutans in human care. Species Survival Plans (SSPs) serve as a safeguard for animals facing extinction in the wild.

Casey, a male western lowland silverback gorilla who came to Audubon in 2002, will be sent to Louisville Zoo on June 12. Berani, a male Sumatran orangutan who has been at Audubon since 2001, is scheduled to move to Denver Zoo at the end of June.

The public is invited to visit the pair before they leave and sign farewell banners created by the Zoo Camp children to be later used for the animals' enrichment before they leave.

"Great apes are in danger of extinction all around the world, due to habitat loss from unsustainable agricultural and mining practices" said Audubon Zoo Curator of Primates Courtney Eparvier.

"In their new homes, Casey and Berani will have renewed opportunities to help the survival of their species. We will always miss them, but we're grateful they will be helping with the effort to preserve great ape populations for the future. Although we care deeply for these animals, moving them is about the bigger picture."

Based on data from conservationists around the world, experts at AZA determine which species are most imperiled in the wild and can best be safeguarded through zoo breeding programs. By moving animals as part of a Species Survival Plan (SSP), zoos are improving the diversity of a threatened species' gene pool to ensure the best chances of healthy offspring so the species may continue to survive.

Gorillas and orangutans are critically endangered. There are 350 gorillas in North American zoos; 12 gorillas were born in North America last year. Many gorilla populations have declined or completely disappeared over the past few decades. The western lowland gorilla is the most widespread, numbering approximately 100,000. Both species of orangutan – Bornean and Sumatran – are critically endangered. The population in North America, which includes both species and hybrids of the two, stands at 222 at 53 institutions.

In 2009, Berani, 23, fathered a female, Menari, with his Audubon Zoo mate, Feliz. Casey, who will be 35 years old on June 28, has been paired with four females during his 15 years at Audubon Zoo, but he has not produced offspring.

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The animal care teams are hopeful that the change of scenery for Casey and Berani will result in breeding successes in the future. As part of a "settling-in" process, Eparvier said animal care staff from Louisville and Denver zoos have visited New Orleans to meet and work with the two primates. Primate staff from Audubon will be accompanying Casey and Berani to their new homes to help with a smooth transition.

"Having current and future staff working with these animals gives everyone a chance to learn about their individual personalities and overall behavior with animal care staff as well as social interactions within the group," she said. "This helps ensure a smooth and positive transition to a new facility."

Eparvier said Casey and Berani will be missed.

"We've worked so closely with these two animals through the years here at Audubon, and they've won a place in the hearts of all our Zoo staff and guests," she said. "It's encouraging to note what outstanding ambassadors for animals in the wild Berani and Casey have been, and they'll carry those qualities with them to their new homes, where we're optimistic they will do great things for the survival of orangutans and gorillas."

Using SSP recommendations, Audubon hopes to care for a new silverback gorilla later this year and bring a new male orangutan to New Orleans in 2018. The new silverback will be recommended to breed with the females. The new male orangutan will be recommended to breed with Feliz.

Eparvier added, "We're optimistic that our new male great apes will win the hearts of guests, as did Casey and Berani, to make positive changes in their everyday lives to help save these amazing species."

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