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AILING CHEETAH EUTHANIZED AT THE MARYLAND ZOO IN BALTIMORE

BALTIMORE, MD -- The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is saddened to announce the death of geriatric male cheetah, Rafiki. Rafiki had been suffering from kidney disease, arthritis, and other age-related ailments, but had remained in fairly good health until recently. During the past few weeks, his quality of life declined sharply and he was humanely euthanized today.

"Kidney disease and arthritis are common diseases of older big cats," stated Dr. Ellen Bronson, chief veterinarian for the Zoo. "We have been able to manage his multiple ailments remarkably well over time despite the fact that he has always been a picky eater. This is in no small part due to the keeper's unfailing care, carefully balancing the needs of this sensitive and special cat."

Rafiki was 14 ½ -years-old and came to The Maryland Zoo from the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Median life expectancy for cheetahs is 11.3 years, according to experts with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. (AZA). "As a geriatric cheetah, the focus has been to keep the level of care consistent to slow the progression of his ailments. Unfortunately, it became apparent that his quality of life was in decline and we knew that the time had come to make the tough decision to euthanize him," continued Bronson.

Cheetahs live in small, isolated populations mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Many of their strongholds are in eastern and southern African parks. Due to human conflict, poaching, and habitat and prey-base loss, there are only an estimated 7,500 to 10,000 cheetahs left in the wild. The International Union for Conservation of Nature considers cheetahs vulnerable to extinction.

About The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore

Founded in 1876, The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is the third oldest zoo in the United States and is internationally known for its contributions in conservation and research. More than 1,500 animals are represented in the Zoo's varied natural habitat exhibits in areas such as Polar Bear Watch, the Maryland Wilderness, African Journey and the award-winning Children's Zoo. Situated in Druid Hill Park near downtown Baltimore, the Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. For more information, visit www.marylandzoo.org.

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