



**Press Release**  
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### **Jackson Zoo Mourns Passing of Elderly White Rhino**

**Jackson, Miss.**— Jackson Zoological Society animal care staff sadly announced the death of their elder Southern White rhinoceros, “Ronnie,” during the night of August 2, 2017. Well past the life expectancy of his relatives in the wild, Ronnie spent nearly 45 years representing the majesty and power of five species of rhinos here in the United States.

Born in South Africa in February of 1973, Ronnie came to the Jackson Zoo in March of 2011 from the White Oak Conservation Center in Yulee, Florida. Since then, he was often the pinnacle of the Jackson Zoo experience, being the largest living creature in the park, until younger “Big Mike” arrived in 2013.

“He was a very special animal to work with, and keepers found him very easy to care for,” said Animal Care Supervisor Willie Bennett. The past few years had seen a major increase in his needs as he got into his forties (the median age of a White or wide-lipped rhino is 34 years). Careful watch over his diet and exercise was required, as well as daily medication for arthritic joints and skin issues caused by his more limited mobility. “Even as his health was declining, Ronnie’s spirit stayed strong,” said Bennett. “He never gave up.”

Keepers described Ronnie as a gentle giant who was not shy about his love of grain or getting “a good scratch behind the ear.” Also known to be a big fan of sweet potatoes, he loved creating and wallowing in mud ravines in his exhibit, twitching his ears around when his name was called. He was a favorite “adoptee” of members throughout the years, including a special relationship with a six-year-old rhino advocate named Mary Gayle. Every year on his birthday since 2012, her family would donate to the park, getting a special visit behind the scenes. Ronnie would come to greet the little girl when she sang to him.

“It is with great sorrow that we share the loss of one of our rhinos, ‘Ronnie,’” Executive Director Beth Poff said. “He has been a part of the zoo for over six years, and was a big part of our special behind-the-scenes experiences for donors. His gentle impressiveness will be missed.”

In the whole world, only about 30,000 rhinos exist today. Southern White rhinos were brought back from the brink of extinction, going from 50 animals in the early 1900’s to current number of about 21,000. Although internationally banned in 1977, the resurgence of illegal poaching in 2012 keeps all five species of rhinos on the IUCN critically endangered list. There are less than 6,000 black rhinos, about 100 Sumatran rhinos, nearly 65 Javan rhinos, and only three Black rhinos remaining in their respective territories. Support for their conservation can be given by visiting or joining the Jackson Zoological Society, giving to conservation and anti-poaching organizations like [savetherhino.org](http://savetherhino.org), or by simply spreading the awareness of plight of these amazing creatures.

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*The Jackson Zoo is accredited by the Zoological Association of America, and certified by the Better Business Bureau. The mission of the Jackson Zoo is to provide visitors with a quality recreational and educational environment dedicated to wildlife care and conservation. For more information, visit The Jackson Zoo online at [jacksonzoo.org](http://jacksonzoo.org), or on [facebook.com/JacksonZoo](https://www.facebook.com/JacksonZoo)*

