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FRESNO CHAFFEE ZOO WARTHOG PIGLETS AFFECTED BY SUSPECTED LIVER TOXIN

Fresno, CA – Fresno Chaffee Zoo keeper and veterinarian staff are working diligently to determine the ongoing cause of liver failure in the Zoo's trio of warthog piglets.

Zuberi, the Zoo's male warthog piglet, is currently in critical but stable condition in the Zoo's hospital. He has been receiving around-the-clock care since March 31 when he was removed from his exhibit after showing signs of illness.

On December 26, 2015, male warthog piglet Kito passed away unexpectedly overnight. Necropsy results suggested liver failure. Ongoing diagnostics have been pursued, looking for the potential causes of his liver disease. On March 9, 2016, female warthog piglet Makena was observed to be acutely lethargic and was taken to the Zoo's hospital for care and observation and passed away that evening. Makena's necropsy results also suggested liver failure.

Throughout this process, veterinarian staff have been in contact with zoo and warthog experts from around the United States; including UC Davis, San Diego pathology, Warthog Species Survival Plan (SSP) and the California Animal Health and Food Safety (CAHFS) Laboratory System looking for answers.

After the death of Kito and Makena, Zoo veterinarian staff performed workup procedures on Zuberi and his four-year-old father, Zuko, to look for possible abnormalities. While no infectious agents or toxins were detected in either animal, Zuberi showed changes on his bloodwork consistent with liver damage.

Fortunately for Zuberi, Zoo veterinarian staff were able to look at the previous warthog piglets' rapid decline in health and notice a pattern that allowed them to intervene and get him to the hospital immediately.

"At this time, we do not know the exact cause of liver failure," said Shannon Nodolf, DVM, Chief Veterinary Officer at Fresno Chaffee Zoo. "The symptoms shown by all three piglets are consistent with that of a pyrrolizidine alkaloid (PA) toxin. However, we have not been able to locate the source of this plant based toxin. Unfortunately, the PA toxin can be ingested months before any systems are apparent. It attacks the liver and then limits the liver's ability to repair itself as it normally would. At some point, the liver is no longer able to maintain its normal functions and that's when the symptoms start to become visible."

Zoo veterinary staff will continue to provide intensive, around-the-clock care and monitoring of Zuberi while also working to attempt to determine the exact cause of liver failure in all three warthogs.

Warthogs (*Phacochoerus africanus*) are a species of wild pig found in the desert and shrub lands of Africa. They get their name from the fleshy "warts" on the side of their face that are actually protective bumps. They are mainly grazers and also use their large snouts to dig or "root" for bulbs or roots. When startled they can run up to 30 miles an hour. Warthogs usually live in Matriarchal groups that consist of sows and their young and yearlings. Boars play no part in the raising of the young.

Fresno Chaffee Zoo is currently open daily from 9 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. by season (subject to change without prior notice). Thanksgiving (9 a.m. – 2 p.m.) and Christmas Day (closed). Visit www.fresnochaffeezoo.org for current hours. General admission during regular Zoo hours is \$10 for adults and \$5.50 for children 2-11 & seniors 62+. Children under 2 and Fresno Chaffee Zoo members are free.

Fresno Chaffee Zoo inspires wonder of our natural world, provides an engaging learning environment, and creates a passion for conservation. The Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA).