



August 11, 2023

## SENECA PARK ZOO MASAI GIRAFFE WILL UNDERGO A BIOPSY PROCEDURE

***Seneca Park Zoo's Masai giraffe Kipenzi will be anesthetized to biopsy and x-ray a growth in her jaw. Skilled team of giraffe, equine, and veterinary experts assembled.***

**ROCHESTER, NY** — Seneca Park Zoo's female Masai giraffe, known to the public as Kipenzi, will undergo a procedure to biopsy and radiograph a growth on her jaw. The growth was observed by staff in late spring 2023 and has been monitored closely by Animal Health and Animal Care teams. Animal Health has been able to take awake and voluntary radiographs of Kipenzi's jaw which indicate that the growth is continuing to increase in size. Additional imaging and testing are needed to determine the cause of the swelling and therefore appropriate treatment; however, a tumor is possible.

Over the past two weeks, the growth in Kipenzi's jaw has become large enough that it is affecting her ability to eat. Changes in food consumption have been observed and Zoo veterinary staff believe, that without intervention, Kipenzi will not survive. When changes in her food consumption were first noted, she was started on pain medications and antibiotics which are keeping her comfortable. She is currently eating well.

"Kipenzi has been a beloved member of the Seneca Park Zoo community since she arrived here five years ago," **said Monroe County Executive Adam Bello**. "We're going to do everything we can to help her, bringing in the best and brightest experts from across the country to take care of her."

Zoo Veterinarian Dr. Chris McKinney has consulted with an accomplished team of veterinarians and animal surgeons at The University of Wisconsin; Michigan State University; Binder Park Zoo (Michigan); Columbus Zoo and Aquarium; Buffalo Zoo; multiple medical advisors for the giraffe group of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA); Colleen Turner, DVM with Veterinary Dental Referral Services; and Cornell University.

McKinney will lead a team that will biopsy the affected tissue and perform possible treatment to the jaw and teeth. He will be joined onsite at the Seneca Park Zoo by Dr. Priya Bapodra-Villaverde, Senior Veterinarian at the Columbus Zoo and AZA Giraffe SSP co-veterinary advisor; Sarah Pell, Veterinarian at Genesee Valley Equine Clinic; Sara Heslop, Veterinarian at Seneca Park Zoo and Pittsford Animal Hospital and; Laurissa Coombs, Veterinarian at ARK Animal Hospital.

"Giraffe anesthesia always carries a much higher risk than in other animals because of their unique physiology," **said Dr. McKinney**. "The adaptations needed for their long necks and legs, along with their massive size work against us when we are trying to perform anesthesia. To try to avoid this risk, we do

as much as we can without anesthesia. Kipenzi has been trained to allow us to x-ray her jaw and we have treated with antibiotics to cover for a possible infection and given pain medications when she showed signs of discomfort. Given the changes we see on the x-ray of her jaw and continued growth of this mass, there is concern that this is a tumor.”

McKinney added the team will not know whether the suspected tumor is benign or malignant until the team can take a closer look inside Kipenzi’s mouth, and until biopsy results come back.

“Unfortunately, because of the anatomy of the giraffe mouth, there is no way to evaluate what is going on inside her mouth without anesthesia,” **said McKinney**. “Her prognosis is guarded. Once we perform this procedure, we will be able to determine what we can do for Kipenzi. Unfortunately, if it is determined this is a malignant tumor, there is likely not anything further that we will be able to do for her.”

The procedure has been scheduled for the morning of August 15<sup>th</sup>. Kipenzi will be anesthetized, and samples will be taken from the growth along with radiographs, or x-rays. Anesthesia is always an extremely high-risk procedure with giraffe, and the success rate drops significantly in procedures over 60 minutes. Seneca Park Zoo Animal Health teams have been meticulously planning and acquiring equipment and medications necessary for the procedure.

According to Zoo officials, the procedure will be performed in a stall in the giraffe barn. The stall has been modified by removing stall furniture, providing additional substrate for improved traction and padding, and padding the walls. This will help to protect Kipenzi during induction and recovery from anesthesia. A handheld blood analyzer will assist the team in monitoring Kipenzi’s critical functions during surgery, notably ventilatory function which can be affected by anesthesia. The team will also monitor her heart function, respirations, blood pressure, blood oxygenation, and temperature throughout the procedure.

“We will have staff supporting her head with a head support that was built here at the Zoo,” **said McKinney**. “The head must be maintained higher than the level of the heart to maintain appropriate blood pressure and reduce the risk of regurgitating fluid from the stomach or rumen. Giraffes are ruminants with a stomach very similar to a cow. As a result, there is always a large amount of fluid and gas present in the rumen which can cause problems during anesthesia.”

Kipenzi, who turned six this year, arrived at the Seneca Park Zoo in August 2018. She was the first giraffe to join the Zoo’s “Animals of the Savanna” exhibit.

**Seneca Park Zoo Superintendent Steve Lacy** said that the assembly of the nation’s leading giraffe experts assembled to treat Kipenzi underscores the seriousness of her condition.

“The threats and challenges presented by Kipenzi’s condition are very real. Seneca Park Zoo’s Animal Health and Animal Care staff have shown such determination and resolve to do everything we can to save Kipenzi’s life,” **Lacy said**. “There is no finer group of people for this job. It is incredibly inspirational to see animal health professionals, not only from our Zoo, but from esteemed facilities around Monroe County and the United States come together to share their knowledge, experience, and the support of their world class animal care facilities to help plan and carry out this procedure.”

Lacy continues, “We thank the esteemed group of veterinary specialists, surgeons, and doctors at The University of Wisconsin, Michigan State University, Binder Park Zoo, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Buffalo

Zoo, Veterinary Dental Referral Services, Genesee Valley Equine Clinic, Pittsford Animal Hospital, ARK Animal Hospital, and Cornell University, led by Seneca Park Zoo’s veterinarian Dr. Chris McKinney, that are coming together to give Kipenzi the best possible chance at saving her life. For our members, guests, and all friends of Seneca Park Zoo and Kipenzi, we appreciate greatly your support and well wishes during this time.”

Zoo officials and veterinary staff will hold a virtual press conference on Friday, August 11<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. In attendance will be Seneca Park Zoo Superintendent, Steve Lacy; Seneca Park Zoo Veterinarian, Dr. Chris McKinney; and Dr. Priya Bapodra-Villaverde, Senior Veterinarian at the Columbus Zoo and AZA Giraffe SSP co-veterinary advisor.

The Animals of the Savanna barn will be closed August 15<sup>th</sup> to accommodate our Animal Health and Care teams. We ask the public for their understanding while the barn is closed. The Zoo will reopen the barn as soon as is safe for the giraffes.

Internationally, and in our own backyard, Seneca Park Zoo plays a key role in species survival. Chartered as an educational institution in 1957 by New York State, the Seneca Park Zoo Society plays an integral role in supporting Monroe County, the owners and operators of the Zoo. Together, we are working to bring animals back from the brink of extinction.

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