



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 24, 2010



Zoo Chimpanzee Undergoes Evaluation

Toledo, Ohio—The Toledo Zoo's animal care staff and a team of over ten outside specialists recently came together to conduct a thorough examination of one of the Zoo's most beloved animals—Harvey, a 51-year-old male chimpanzee—after it was determined that he had an abnormal heart rhythm. While Harvey is a geriatric animal (he's among the oldest chimpanzees in any U.S. zoo), his condition is manageable, and this examination proved to be an effective way to ensure that he'll enjoy a high quality of life through his golden years at the Zoo.

During routine echocardiogram training in February, it was revealed that Harvey had an arrhythmia. The Veterinary staff was able to examine Harvey, thanks in large part to the unique relationship that Harvey has with one of his keepers, Suzanne Husband, who has worked with Harvey for over 20 years. "Because Harvey trusts Suzanne so much," says Curator of Mammals Dr. Randi Meyerson, "she was able to help the veterinarians perform ultrasounds, EKGs and blood pressure testing without having to immobilize him." As a result of these initial tests, it was determined that the top chambers of Harvey's heart are enlarged. According to Chief Veterinarian Dr. Chris Hanley, "There was a concern that this could lead to a clot, which could then travel to another part of his body and cause even greater problems and potential death."

To get a more complete ultrasound of the heart as well as perform blood work, radiographs, and a full dental examination, it was decided Harvey would be immobilized so that the best course of action could be determined. Immobilizing an animal, especially a geriatric animal such as Harvey, carries risks, but according to Dr. Hanley, "apes generally don't display symptoms of illness until it's too late. Waiting to conduct this thorough examination until Harvey presented visible symptoms would have meant increased risks to his health."

Over the course of the examination, one team checked his heart, another ultrasounded his abdomen, and still another took a look at his teeth. In addition, an endoscopy team was on hand to give him a colonoscopy, and his prostrate was checked as well. Fortunately, no clot was found in his heart, although he does have arthritis in his spine. "Knowing the condition of Harvey's kidneys, liver and other organs," said Dr. Hanley, "enables us to prescribe the best course of treatment." All of the specialists, as well as a pair of nurse anesthetists, generously donated their services and equipment use to the Zoo.

Harvey has begun a regimen of medication to slow the progression of his heart disease and help prevent a clot from forming. According to Dr. Meyerson, "It's inspiring to know that Harvey is receiving such great care and that he can enjoy a high quality of life at an advanced age. We'll monitor his response to this treatment and work to ensure that he's living as comfortably as possible for the remainder of his life."

The Toledo Zoo is committed to inspiring others to join in caring for animals and conserving the natural world. As part of that mission, The Toledo Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), a leader in global wildlife conservation. AZA member institutions are dedicated to providing excellent care for animals, a great experience for visitors and a better future for all living things.

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