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ZOO KNOXVILLE TIGER TESTS POSITIVE FOR SARS-CoV-2

SARS-Coronavirus-2 is the same virus that causes COVID-19 in humans.

Knoxville, Tenn. (Oct. 30, 2020) –One of Zoo Knoxville’s Malayan tigers has tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, the same virus that causes COVID-19 in humans.

Arya, a 6-year-old female and Bashir and Tanvir, 11-year-old males, exhibited mild coughing, lethargy and decrease in appetite, and were tested for a range of potential causes, including SARS-CoV-2. The initial test results for Bashir and Arya were communicated by the Runstadler Lab at Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University in Grafton, Massachusetts. Samples from Bashir have been confirmed as positive by the USDA’s National Veterinary Services Laboratories, based in Ames, Iowa, and confirmatory testing for the other two tigers is in process, but they are presumed positive.

The tigers will be released from quarantine once they are symptom free for 72 hours and either all diagnostic tests are negative or 14 days have passed since the last positive test in accordance with CDC guidelines. Arya, Bashir and Tanvir are being cared for by the veterinary team from the University of Tennessee College of Veterinary Medicine and are alert, active and no longer exhibiting symptoms.

Zoo Knoxville is working with state and local animal and human health agencies to determine the source of the infection, which at this time is suspected to be an asymptotically infected staff member working in close proximity to the tigers when caring for them.

No other animals at Zoo Knoxville have shown signs of illness. Zoo Knoxville’s safety protocols include the use of protective gear while caring for animals, and this was standard practice before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. All zoo staff follow COVID safety protocols recommended by the CDC and the Tennessee Pledge.

Based on limited information available to date, the risk of animals, including these tigers, spreading the virus that causes COVID-19 to people is low. Zoo Knoxville’s tigers are participating in the Coronavirus Epidemiological Research and Surveillance (CoVERS) study, run by the Runstadler lab at Cummings School, which is studying SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 transmission between humans and animals. The CoVERS team is investigating which species can get this novel coronavirus, if animals can further transmit it to other animals, if the virus causes disease in some animals, and if the virus needs to mutate to infect different species.

Zoo Knoxville is grateful for the cooperation and support of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture Animal Health Division and the Tennessee State Veterinarian, Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, the USDA National Veterinary Services Laboratories, the Tennessee Department of Health and the Knox County Health Department for their assistance.

Zoo Knoxville is a nonprofit entity situated on 53 wooded acres just east of downtown Knoxville. Zoo Knoxville features exhibits of wild animals in natural habitats and is world renowned for its efforts in conservation and species survival. Zoo Knoxville is nationally accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) and is committed to the highest standards in animal care and well-being, ethics, conservation, and education. Knoxville’s largest attraction, the zoo is open every day except Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Currently, the zoo is open Monday through Wednesday from 9:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m., and Thursday through Sunday from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Admission and ticket sales stop one-hour before the zoo closes. For more information visit zooknoxville.org.

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