



ELDERLY RED WOLF GRAHAM HUMANELY EUTHANIZED AT POINT DEFIANCE ZOO & AQUARIUM

At nearly 15, he was the face of the zoo's pioneering program to save red wolves from extinction

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TACOMA, Wash. – Graham, a striking red wolf who became the “face” of a decades-long effort to save his species from extinction, died at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium on Tuesday. He would have been 15 next month, far surpassing the 11-year median life expectancy for red wolves.



Zoo veterinarians humanely euthanized the geriatric red wolf after he fell gravely ill.

Graham also was being treated for severe arthritis and suffered from mobility issues, said Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium veterinarian Dr. Kadie Anderson.

“Our entire zoo family is saddened by the loss of Graham, who lived a long and productive life as the ‘poster child’ for this critically endangered species,” said Dr. Karen Goodrowe, the zoo’s General Curator.

Geriatric red wolf Graham was humanely euthanized Tuesday at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium.

The geriatric wolf had lived for 11 years in the zoo’s Red Wolf Woods habitat filled with hardwood trees and vegetation similar to what his species might encounter in its native Southeastern United States. But animals, like humans, are prone to arthritis and other infirmities as they age. Graham moved more slowly in recent months and his legs appeared to be stiff when standing, Senior Staff Biologist Jennifer Donovan said.

Zoo staff had been monitoring Graham closely and recording his movements and behavior to gauge his quality of life, Anderson, said.

“We lost an icon among icons,” said Donovan, whose team of zookeepers cared for Graham for many years. “He did great things for the red wolf story as a dynamic and highly photogenic ambassador for the typically shy and elusive species.”

Graham died peacefully, she added, “taking a bit of our hearts with him.”

He was born on April 28, 2003, at the zoo’s off-site red wolf facility. Graham’s conception through artificial insemination was one of several milestones in collaborative efforts by Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and other zoos to save the critically endangered species. Goodrowe, who holds a doctorate in reproductive biology, led the research team of biologists and veterinarians that facilitated his birth through the Association of Zoos & Aquariums’ Species Survival Plan® (SSP) managed breeding program.

Six years ago, Graham sired a large litter of red wolf pups with mate Millie. Millie, along with two of their sons, Haywood and Hyde, remain in the zoo’s Red Wolf Woods habitat.

Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, working with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, pioneered the Red Wolf Recovery program in the 1970s after scientists determined the critically endangered species would go extinct without intervention. Just 14 of the once populous species remained at that time.

Reintroduction efforts in northeastern North Carolina begun in 1987 by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service boosted the wild population to nearly 130 wolves by 2007. But today, the red wolf, whose range once extended across the Southeastern United States, is again at the very brink of extinction. Often mistaken for coyotes, they’ve suffered increasing deaths over the last decade from gunshot and other human conflict. Today, their wild numbers have plunged to just 40.

The Red Wolf Recovery program remains committed to restoring this iconic predator – one of the rarest of all of America’s native species – to its historic home in the wild. The program is a cooperative effort among 43 U.S. zoos and wildlife centers, said Will Waddell, the zoo’s Red Wolf Program Supervisor, who also coordinates the SSP. The coalition is studying new locations for release sites where wolves will remain safer. Cooperative breeding facilities are home to 220 adults and juveniles, Waddell said.

The zoo’s leadership in the Red Wolf Recovery effort has been extensive through the years. In addition to Waddell’s work, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium Head Veterinarian Dr. Karen Wolf is the SSP veterinary adviser; Craig Standridge, the zoo’s Community Engagement Coordinator, serves as education adviser; and Goodrowe is the reproductive adviser.

Graham, who appeared in a graphic novel, on posters, in magazine articles, newspapers, digital media and on television, was for years the face of Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium’s signature conservation program, Waddell said. He also was a favorite of zoo visitors, often standing regally on a rock or moving swiftly through the woods, engaging visitors and drawing smiles.

“Graham will be greatly missed, but he leaves a legacy that will inspire us to continue our efforts to conserve this highly endangered species,” Waddell said.

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Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, the Northwest’s only combined zoo and aquarium, practices and promotes responsible stewardship of the world’s resources through education, conservation, research and recreational opportunities. The zoo, a division of Metro Parks Tacoma, is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA) and the Alliance of Marine Mammal Parks and Aquariums (AMMPA).

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