EXHIBITS

AUDUBON NATURE INSTITUTE UNVEILS WHOOPING CRANE BREEDING FACILITY

Audubon Center for Research of Endangered Species (ACRES) has unveiled a new facility dedicated to assisted reproduction of whooping cranes, the most endangered crane in the world.

Audubon's new breeding facility includes ten specially designed pens to house pairs of whooping cranes and a chick-rearing facility designed to help boost the numbers of these critically endangered birds. The Whooping Crane Breeding Facility was funded through a $1.2 million grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and is housed at Audubon Nature Institute's Audubon Center for Research of Endangered Species.

Whooping cranes were nearly extinct in the 1940s when their numbers dwindled to just 20 animals in the wild. Through conservation and assisted reproduction efforts like the work that will be done at Audubon's facility, the numbers of the birds are slowly increasing. Audubon will assist with breeding these rare birds and raising whooping crane chicks for release in the wild.

Audubon Zoo made history in 1956 with whooping cranes, becoming the first zoo to breed the birds in captivity. That success was symbolized by the famous Josephine, one of the last of Louisiana's wild flock. Josephine (known as "Jo") was found with a broken wing and brought by an Evangeline Parish farmer to Audubon Zoo, where she and mate Krip went on to produce 52 eggs with three surviving chicks. Audubon's cranes were relocated to the International Crane Foundation in the 1970s.

Audubon Nature Institute hopes to play an even more critical role in the survival of the species. Audubon Zoo has a pair of the endangered birds on exhibit to keep the birds in the public spotlight, while scientists at the behind-the-scenes westbank facility strive to boost the numbers of the cranes for a proposed future release to Louisiana habitats. Audubon's scientists have developed assisted reproduction technologies, such as an artificial insemination with frozen semen process that produced the Mississippi crane "Cryochick" last year. Applying Audubon-pioneered techniques to the rarest cranes will have a dramatic impact on the species' long-term viability.

N.C. Zoo Director Dr. David Jones cuts the ribbon at the opening ceremony for the *Watani Grasslands* exhibit.

NORTH CAROLINA ZOO UNVEILS EXPANDED ELEPHANT AND RHINOCEROS FACILITIES

On 4 April 2008, the North Carolina Zoo held ribbon-cutting ceremonies for the *Watani Grasslands Reserve*, an $8.5-million expansion of the Zoo's elephant and rhinoceros exhibits and holding facilities.

The event marked the completion of more than four years of fundraising and 18 months of construction on the *Watani* project. The expansion included a new $2.5-million, state-of-the -art elephant holding barn, increasing the elephant exhibit from three-and-a-half to seven acres and transfer of the southern white rhinos from their previous three-and-a-half-acre exhibit to share the 40-acre *African Plains* habitat with ten species of antelope.

Named for a Swahili term meaning fatherland, the *Watani* project has enabled the N.C. Zoo to expand its rhino collection from three to nine animals and its elephant herd from three to seven. Nearly $7.3 million dollars for the project was raised from private sources by the N.C. Zoological Society, the Zoo's non-profit support organization. This helped create some of the largest and most modern facilities for the care and rearing of elephants and rhinos in the U.S.

The exhibits include a new immersion walkway that carries visitors more than 70 yards into the elephant exhibit as well as a host of new educational interpretive facilities and artworks designed to tell the stories of elephants and rhinos and their plight in the wild.

Among the speakers for the ribbon cutting was Dr. Martin Tchamba, the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) official who has helped lead the N.C. Zoo's highly successful elephant conservation program in Cameroon, Africa. Tchamba, director of conservation for WWF's Central Africa Regional Program Office, and Dr. Mike Loomis, the Zoo's chief veterinarian, have been the primary architects of the ten-year project that utilizes satellite technology to document the migration patterns of elephants in and around several of Cameroon's national parks. Their efforts have been directly responsible for major reductions in both elephant and human deaths as well as crop losses in the project areas.

Other speakers for the ceremonies included Dr. David Jones, director of the N.C. Zoo, Russ Williams, executive director of the Zoological Society, U.S. Representative Howard Coble (R-NC, 6th District) and Bill Ross, Secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the department of state government that operates the Zoo. ■