



## MEDIA ALERT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
March 27, 2009

### HAPPY BIRTHDAY, ZOO ATLANTA! *Atlanta's oldest cultural institution turns 120*

**WHO:** It's been 120 years since the circus came to town – and never left. Zoo Atlanta celebrates its 120<sup>th</sup> birthday on March 28, 2009, recalling the date when one visionary entrepreneur backed the beginnings of one of Georgia's most beloved attractions.

In March 1889, a traveling circus – Colonel G.W. Hall's Railroad Show Bingley's Monster European Menagerie, by name – went bankrupt just south of Atlanta. Disgruntled circus employees deserted the show, leaving a ragtag collection of caged wildlife behind. The homeless motley crew, which included a jaguar, a hyena, a black bear, a raccoon and several lionesses, pumas, camels and snakes, had already drawn scores of curious Victorian gawkers by the time it was announced that the erstwhile circus stars would be placed at public auction.

On March 28, 1889, businessman George Valentine Gress purchased the entire collection, donating the wildlife to the city of Atlanta. One of only 13 zoos in the U.S. at the time, the Gress Zoological Gardens opened that April, with Grant Park streetcars straining to accommodate an opening weekend attendance of nearly 12,000.

Now home to more than 1,300 mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians and the locus of numerous international conservation programs, Zoo Atlanta remains one of the top 10 oldest zoos in continuous operation in America. "Reaching this milestone is exciting especially as we embark on an amazing 20 year master plan that will transform and take Zoo Atlanta into the next 120 years," said Zoo Atlanta President and CEO Dennis Kelly.

**WHERE:** Zoo Atlanta  
800 Cherokee Avenue, S.E.  
Atlanta, GA 30315

**CONTACT:** Keisha N. Hines Davis, Director of Public Relations and Communications  
404.624.5980 – office  
404.309.2239 – cell  
[khines-davis@zooatlanta.org](mailto:khines-davis@zooatlanta.org)

Simone Griffin, Public Relations Coordinator  
404.624.2809  
[sgriffin@zooatlanta.org](mailto:sgriffin@zooatlanta.org)

**ABOUT:**

**About Zoo Atlanta**

An accredited member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), Zoo Atlanta inspires value and preservation of wildlife through a unique mix of education and outdoor family fun. From well-known native wildlife to critically endangered species on the brink of extinction, the Zoo offers memorable close encounters with more than 1,300 animals from around the world. Zoo Atlanta is the proud home of Xi Lan, the only giant panda cub born in the U.S. in 2008, and the future home of the Southeast's largest parakeet aviary, an immersive experience opening in April 2009. Other highlights include one of the nation's most recognized collections of great apes and a global center of excellence for the care and reproduction of vanishing amphibians and reptiles. Zoo Atlanta is open daily with the exceptions of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. Keeper talks, interactive wildlife shows, education programs and special events run year-round. For more information, call 404.624.WILD or go to [zooatlanta.org](http://zooatlanta.org).

##