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Phoenix Zoo's Orangutan Michael Undergoes Surgery for Rare Cancer ***This type of cancer has never been seen before in any orangutan.***

PHOENIX (August 15, 2025) – Michael, thirty-eight years old, one of the Phoenix Zoo's much-loved orangutans, is recovering after undergoing a second surgery to remove a rare type of cancer.

Several months ago, keepers noticed a small skin mass near Michael's right armpit that was slowly growing. In June, veterinary staff anesthetized Michael for further evaluation and successfully removed the mass for testing. Pathology specialists in both primate and human medicine confirmed the diagnosis as apocrine carcinoma, cancer of the sweat glands – an extremely rare form of cancer that can be locally invasive and aggressive. Experts also confirmed, to the best of their knowledge, this is the first documented case of this type of cancer in any orangutan.

"While apocrine carcinoma is an extremely rare cancer, our priority is to give Michael the best chance for a healthy future," says Dr. Gary West, Phoenix Zoo Senior Vice President of Animal Health & Living Collections. "Michael is an incredible animal with a big personality, and we are doing everything we can to ensure he gets the best possible care."

Because initial testing showed that the first surgery did not completely remove all cancer cells, Michael underwent a second surgical procedure on August 14 in collaboration with Dr. Jeffrey Steurer, D.V.M., M.S., D.A.C.V.S., of Southwest Veterinary Surgical Service and Zoo veterinarians. During the operation, surgeons removed additional tissue around the tumor site to ensure clear margins and injected tracer dye to track lymphatic drainage. This process helped identify and remove nearby lymph nodes, which will now be examined for signs to determine if the cancer may have spread.

If the cancer has not metastasized to Michael's lymphatic system and the tumor was fully removed, his prognosis will be much more favorable. Pathology results from the second surgery are expected in the coming weeks and will help determine next steps in his treatment.

In the meantime, Michael is recovering well under the watchful eyes of his care team, who are providing him with special enrichment, rest and plenty of his favorite foods. The Zoo is home to four Bornean orangutans; two females, Bess and Rayma and two males, Michael and Wgasa. (pronounced wuh-gah-suh).

About the Arizona Center for Nature Conservation

The Arizona Center for Nature Conservation operates the Phoenix Zoo. The ACNC advances the stewardship and conservation of animals and their habitats while providing experiences that inspire people and motivate them to care for the natural world.

The Phoenix Zoo is the only zoo in the Valley accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and is a non-profit zoological park, serving 1.4 million guests annually. The Zoo is home to more than 3,000 animals, many of which are endangered and threatened species. For information on upcoming events, exhibits and activities at the Phoenix Zoo, visit www.phoenixzoo.org.