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President George W. Bush speaks with members of the Washington Ballet after they performed in a children's Christmas reception program Monday at the White House for local children from military families.

CHUCK KENNEDY • KRT CAMPUS

Rare white tigers return to Ohio zoo

ABILENE, Texas (AP) — Two rare white tigers are scheduled to return home to an Ohio zoo after spending a year at the Abilene Zoo.

The tigers' departure marks the end of challenging times for the animals and their keepers.

Kodi and Kayla came to Abilene on a six-month loan from the African Wildlife Safari Park in Port Clinton, Ohio, in October 2002, but they ended up staying much longer after Kodi became ill with temporary diabetes.

Kodi became sick in November 2002, and needed continued care from the zoo's veterinarians, Dr. Dale Hembree said.

The tiger was listless and had no appetite because of the diabetes. Doctors believe the trip to Abilene and a drug used to sedate him for the trip likely caused the illness, Hembree said in Monday's online edition of the Abilene Reporter-News.

Initial blood tests indicated Kodi had diabetes, an illness that occurs when the pancreas doesn't produce enough insulin.

After a consultation with an internal medicine specialist at Texas A&M University, Hembree discovered Kodi had glucose tolerance or temporary diabetes, the first such case diagnosed in a large cat.

Hembree and his team treated Kodi with insulin. The team was diligent about keeping accurate records because their daily treatments would set a precedent.

During Kodi's treatment, zoo officials worried that he wouldn't make it because his glucose level began to fluctuate wildly. Hembree later discovered the tiger no longer needed insulin shots, which were causing the fluctuation.

Kodi's eyesight was affected by the illness requiring surgery in March. Hembree said the cat has since recovered.

Hembree and his team said they will always treasure the experience of caring for the cat.

"None of us will ever forget it," Stephen DeGesero, a mammal supervisor at the zoo, said.

Zoo officials plan to bring in two African lions to replace the tigers. The 1-year-old brother lions are from Cheyenne Mountain Zoo in Colorado Springs, Colo.

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