

London Zoo plans to focus on breeding rare species

LONDON (Reuter-Kyodo) London Zoo, which narrowly escaped extinction last year, announced details of a survival plan Thursday that emphasizes the breeding of endangered species.

The £21 million (\$30 million) plan will turn the 14.5 hectare site at Regents Park in central London into an animal-conservation and captive-breeding center.

The 166-year-old zoo, the world's oldest, was threatened with closure last year after the government withdrew funding.

But reports of the imminent closure brought a surge of paying visitors rushing for a last glimpse of the zoo. The emir of Kuwait donated £1 million (\$1.45 million) and the zoo announced preliminary plans for saving itself in October.

The zoo said it will focus on breeding animals such as

Asian elephants, Sumatran tigers, lowland gorillas and "the minuscule but highly endangered Partula snails."

The zoo, whose past crowd pullers have included Guy the gorilla and Chi-Chi the panda, said it will focus on scientific research and public concern about the welfare of animals.

Zoo director Jo Gipps said £2.5 million (\$3.6 million) has already been secured.

"There may have been many plans for London Zoo in the past. We firmly believe that this plan has the ingredients for success," Gipps told a news conference.

"We have achieved financial stability. The turmoil of the past two years is behind us."

Animal rights activists had welcomed the possibility of the zoo's closure, saying it was too small and urban to be anything but a prison for animals.

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