



County of Onondaga  
Office of the County Executive

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**Media Release**

**For Immediate Release:** 6.21.2019

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## **County Executive Ryan McMahon Unveils New Zoo Walkway; Baby Elephant Ajay Makes Debut**

*\$2.2 million renovation of Wildlife Trail*

**SYRACUSE, N.Y.** – Onondaga County Executive Ryan McMahon joined Zoo Director Ted Fox, Friends President Janet Agostini & Parks Commissioner Bill Lansley to cut the ribbon on the new walkway project at the Rosamond Gifford Zoo today. The ribbon cutting was followed by a surprise debut of baby Asian elephant Ajay who emerged on exhibit for the first time.

The event signified the official opening of the \$2.2 million renovation of the zoo's Wildlife Trail and baby Asian elephant Ajay's long-awaited entrance into the main exhibit space at the Asian Elephant Preserve.

County Executive McMahon said, "The renovation of the new boardwalk is a welcomed addition to our already fantastic zoo. Visitors will not only have a more enjoyable and accessible walkway, but amazing views of our elephant exhibit."

This project began last fall with the removal of a 30-year-old boardwalk that needed to be replaced. Onondaga County and the Zoo took the opportunity to do something that would vastly improve accessibility for wheelchairs, walkers and strollers as well as the general public, create a better visitor experience and showcase the beautiful views and terrain of this section of the zoo.

"The folks who work at the Zoo do a tremendous job, under the leadership of Zoo Director Ted Fox, at providing a world-class experience for visitors and providing top notch care for our animals." McMahon continued, "Thank you to them and our Friends group, including President Janet Agostini, for all of their hard work."

The public then proceeded to the main overlook for a special treat; 5-month-old baby elephant Ajay ("Ah-JAI"), his mother, Mali, and grandmother, Targa, came out into the main yard of the elephant preserve – Ajay's first time on public exhibit.

“This is a moment that I have been waiting for and I’m sure the public has, too,” McMahon said.

Fox said the baby will now be on exhibit daily. He said renovations to the elephant preserve are not complete, but elephants will be able to use the main yard during the finishing touches. When it’s done, the preserve will go from 4.5 acres to nearly 7 acres.

By the end of summer, the new walkway will offer views of Therold’s White-lipped deer enjoying a mud wallow and the zoo’s pair of critically endangered red wolves.

The Rosamond Gifford Zoo is Syracuse’s accredited member of the Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA), the gold standard for animal care, conservation education and guest experience. For information on zoo events, please visit [www.syracusezooevents.org](http://www.syracusezooevents.org)

### **Association of Zoos & Aquariums Species Survival Plan for Asian Elephants**

#### **BY THE NUMBERS**

- **Zoos and aquariums accredited by AZA: 236**
- **Number of Asian elephants remaining in the wild: 30,000**
- **Conservation status: Critically endangered**
- **AZA zoos participating in the Species Survival Plan for Asian Elephants: 30**
- **AZA zoos equipped and approved to breed Asian elephants: 11**

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