

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | August 22, 2014
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Woodland Park Zoo mourns the unexpected death of African elephant Watoto Press conference scheduled for Friday, August 22 at 2:30 p.m.

SEATTLE – With great sadness, Woodland Park Zoo regrettably announces the unexpected passing of 45-year-old African elephant, Watoto, who was humanely euthanized late Friday morning.

Woodland Park Zoo will be holding a press conference today at the zoo's ARC near the West Entrance at N. 55th St. & Phinney Ave. N.

Woodland Park Zoo keepers arrived early Friday morning and saw Watoto lying down in the elephant yard and unable to move to an upright position, which is unusual for her. Elephant keepers and animal health staff first attempted lifting Watoto to her feet with the support of cloth straps and later with careful assistance of heavy machinery. Woodland Park Zoo's animal health staff were present to assess Watoto's well-being and provide emergency care, though it was apparent her health was quickly declining and she would likely become more uncomfortable as hours passed. With compassion and sadness, Woodland Park Zoo's keepers and animal health staff made the difficult decision to humanely euthanize her.

"This is a very difficult time for our zoo family as we mourn the loss of Watoto, a beloved animal and dear friend to our staff and volunteers, members and community," said Bruce Bohmke, Woodland Park Zoo's Chief Operations Officer. "Watoto has lived a long, healthful life at Woodland Park Zoo under the care of dedicated keepers and staff. We will all miss her greatly."

Woodland Park Zoo's animal health team is currently conducting a full necropsy, an animal autopsy, and findings will be released in the coming weeks. The south end of the Elephant Forest exhibit will remain closed until further notice while staff attends to matters relating to Watoto's death.

Watoto was born in Kenya between 1969 and 1970, and joined Woodland Park Zoo's elephant herd in 1971 as an orphan from the wild. Her name is Swahili for "children," and she is considered to be the matriarch or leader of the zoo's herd. Watoto is the only African elephant at Woodland Park Zoo and is distinguished by her large ears, saddle-shaped back and visible tusk.

PRESS CONFERENCE

WHAT:

A press conference will be held at the zoo's ARC near the West Entrance at N. 55th St. & Phinney Ave. N. Parking may be limited.

WHEN:

Friday, August 22, 2:30 p.m.

WHO:

Woodland Park Zoo Chief Operations Officer, Bruce Bohmke
Woodland Park Zoo Director of Animal Health, Dr. Darin Collins

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