

PRESS RELEASE

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Editor note: For new video, visit: <https://youtu.be/4ey6c32QVww>

Getting to know you: mom and baby gorilla introductions moving along

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo's new mother gorilla and her baby, a female, are getting to know each other and learning new things about each other day by day.

The new [western lowland gorilla](#) has been under 24/7 human care since her birth two months ago to 19-year-old Nadiri (NAW-duh-ree). A first-time, inexperienced mom, Nadiri gave birth naturally but did not pick up her baby or show strong maternal skills. Staff immediately stepped in for the safety and welfare of the baby and to allow the new mom to rest.

Nadiri didn't have experience with motherhood, so the zoo prepared for different outcomes while she was pregnant, including human intervention.

The baby gorilla receives attentive care by zoo gorilla and veterinary staff in a den behind the scenes of the gorilla exhibit, where Nadiri can see her baby and her baby can see her mom throughout the day, every day. "For the long-term benefits and welfare of the baby gorilla, it's important for her to know she's a gorilla, not a human. She never leaves the gorilla den. Here, she is exposed to her mom and can also see, hear and smell the zoo's other gorillas," said Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "It's also a step toward integrating her into a family."

Multiple times a day, the mom and baby gorilla are introduced to each other in the same den. During recent sessions, the two have lain just inches apart. "This is definitely progress. The close proximity is a good sign they're comfortable together and getting to know each other," said Ramirez.

Meanwhile, the baby, currently weighing 8 pounds, continues to thrive and achieve the appropriate milestones at 2 months old. "She's getting stronger every day and developing motor skills. Like a typical baby, she's curious and exploring her surroundings," said Ramirez. The baby also has cut new teeth. "Her fourth tooth just came in, so like most typical baby mammals, she has the urge to chew. She's chewing on leaves her mom offers."

The father of the baby gorilla is 36-year-old Vip, who has sired six other offspring with three different females at the zoo. He currently lives at the zoo in another group with two females.

Congo, who was Nadiri's father, was born in the wild. When he died 20 years ago, he had no other known family in the population of gorillas in zoos. Therefore, Nadiri and her baby both carry very valuable genes for the Gorilla Species Survival Plan (SSP), a cooperative breeding program to help ensure a healthy, self-sustaining population of gorillas for the next 100 years. Woodland Park Zoo participates in 95 SSPs, overseen by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums.

In February, Nadiri turns 20. She, herself, was hand raised as an infant because her mother, Jumoke, experienced complications during labor and a team of human physicians were called in to assist the zoo's veterinary staff with the delivery. Despite daily attempts to introduce Jumoke to her newborn, she didn't show any interest in her baby. During Nadiri's time of birth, it was customary, and acceptable with current scientific knowledge, to hand raise great apes with expert care staff in sterile nurseries.



Two decades later, as animal care and husbandry practices have evolved, gorilla infant care has shifted from a human-centric program to a gorilla-centric upbringing.

“Gorillas are intelligent animals that live in complex, social groups. Constantly being with a mom is natural for an infant gorilla. This gives the infant confidence and a sense of security. These are critical characteristics for a gorilla to live a healthy, social life with multigenerational gorillas, which is a natural grouping for the great ape,” explained Woodland Park Zoo General Curator Nancy Hawkes, who has a PhD in biology and specializes in mammal reproduction. “This is why raising a baby gorilla needs to be gorilla-centric from the start. Today, following proven, advanced practices, we are focused on making sure she is exposed around the clock to tactile, visual, auditory, and olfactory stimuli by her mom and other gorillas.”

The zoo will continue its hands-on care program for the baby gorilla for approximately the next two months before evaluating next steps, and will continue mother and infant introductions as long as the sessions remain positive.

In mid-February, the zoo will reach out to the community to help name the baby gorilla. A naming contest will be announced and information will be available on the zoo’s website at www.zoo.org.

The other gorillas currently living at Woodland Park Zoo are: females Amanda, 45; Jumoke, 30; Akenji, 14; Uzumma, 8; and males Pete, 47, and Leonel, 37.

The western lowland gorilla lives in seven countries across west equatorial Africa: southeast Nigeria, Gabon, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Congo, Angola and Equatorial Guinea. All gorillas are endangered; the western lowland gorilla is critically endangered. The estimated population of western lowland gorillas in the wild is about 95,000. There are three primary reasons gorillas are endangered. One is habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture. The bushmeat trade, facilitated by logging, has become an immediate threat to the western lowland gorilla population, particularly in Cameroon. Additionally, infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus have recently become a great threat, killing many gorillas.

Woodland Park Zoo supports conservation efforts for the critically endangered western lowland gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Study](#). The study researches the social organization and behaviors of more than 450 lowland gorillas living in the southwest of Nouabale-Ndoki National Park, Republic of Congo. The data collected enables scientists to assess the vulnerability of populations to habitat threats and predict their ability to recover from decline.

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