

PRESS RELEASE

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Media contact: Gigi Allanic, Alissa Wolken
206.548.2550 | woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org

Geriatric orangutan to undergo examination

SEATTLE—Towan (toe-WAHN), a male orangutan at Woodland Park Zoo, will be anesthetized Thursday, March 24, for an examination. The 257-pound orangutan turned 48 last month and is currently North America's oldest orangutan born in a zoo. The median life expectancy for orangutans is 28 years with a maximum lifespan of 59.

According to Dr. Darin Collins, Woodland Park Zoo's director of animal health, Towan has exhibited respiratory concerns over the past few weeks. "We have Towan on a prescribed program of antibiotics and under close observation but symptoms have not improved. The examination will allow us to investigate the source of the respiratory issues and determine necessary treatment," said Collins.

The medical exam will be conducted at the zoo's Animal Health Complex. "His symptoms raise concerns for a significant health risk. Our dedicated zookeepers and veterinary staff are taking every safety precaution possible to prepare Towan for a successful examination," added Collins.

As the field of zoo medicine continues to evolve—improved husbandry and management techniques, excellent animal care, better nutrition, increased medical knowledge, diagnostic and therapeutic techniques—animals in zoos are living longer. "Because of expanded life expectancies in many animals, including great apes, animals experience the aches and pains of getting older, just like with aging humans," said Martin Ramirez, Woodland Park Zoo's curator of mammals. "Over the past few years, we've been carefully monitoring Towan's age-related renal dysfunction."

To address the longer life expectancies for many animal species, the zoo has a formal process to evaluate quality of life daily, sometimes multiple times daily, over the course of weeks or months once there is a concern for an individual's well-being. The decision to euthanize an animal is a very difficult one and is made after consultation between veterinary and appropriate animal collection staff.

[Towan and his twin sister, Chinta](#), were born at Woodland Park Zoo in 1968 and gained instant national celebrity status as the first-known twin orangutans born in a zoo. Photos of the pair in diapers appeared around the globe, including "Life" magazine. While other twins have since been born, twin orangutan births are still a rare occurrence.

In addition to Towan and Chinta, the zoo's other orangutans are: 44-year-old Melati; 34-year-old Belawan, daughter of Towan and Melati; and 27-year-old Heran, son of Towan and Melati.

Orangutans, an endangered species, belong to the family Hominidae, which includes all four great apes: gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans. Distinct species of orangutans live on the islands of Borneo and Sumatra in Southeast Asia. Overpopulation, logging, agriculture, conversion of forests to oil palm plantations, and other human activities are rapidly destroying forest environments required by orangutans for survival. Learn about Woodland Park Zoo's partnership with [Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program](#) in Borneo, whose focus is to help build a future where orangutans and other wildlife can thrive alongside local villages.

For more information about Woodland Park Zoo or to become a member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

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