

PRESS RELEASE

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Local medical team helps save the life of zoo gorilla *Gorilla undergoes successful surgery and follow-up*

SEATTLE—A team of human medical specialists joined Woodland Park Zoo's animal health team last month to perform emergency umbilical hernia surgery repair on a 38-year-old male gorilla named Vip. The medical and veterinary teams re-convened over the weekend to examine the gorilla's surgical site and perform dental and sinus procedures.

"Thanks to the expertise of the medical team, Vip successfully pulled through both the surgery and follow-up examination and is back with his family as he recovers," said Dr. Darin Collins, Woodland Park Zoo's director of animal health. "The silverback (adult male gorilla) remains under close observation by his attentive caretakers and we'll continue to keep him on a prescribed program of analgesics and joint medication."

Prior to the surgery, keepers had reported that the 430-pound, western lowland gorilla had shown signs of decline including mobility challenges, a reduced appetite, weight loss and sluggishness. The zoo's senior veterinarian called in a special team of human medical specialists and a veterinary consultant to assist in diagnosing Vip and to explore a potential hernia issue. An ultrasound exam revealed an infection associated with the hernia in the umbilical region and the decision was made to perform emergency surgery that same day.

"Vip's condition was serious and we definitely required the expert surgical intervention of the medical specialists," said Collins. "We rely on a local network of volunteer medical specialists to help us provide top-notch health care for our 1,000-plus animals. We are very grateful to this team who donated their time and expertise to help save the life of our much loved gorilla."

During the follow-up examination of the gorilla's surgical site, the medical team also administered a dental exam and extracted a loose tooth. In addition, Vip, who has [a history of chronic sinus infection](#), underwent an endoscopic sinus exam as a precaution.

Serving on the human medical team for Vip's surgery were: Greg Davis, MD, MPH, University of Washington associate professor of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery and Director of Rhinology and Endoscopic Skull Base Surgery; Andrew Wright, MD, Director of the UW Medicine Hernia Center at Northwest Hospital; Robert Yates, MD, surgeon, Northwest Hospital and University of Washington Medical Center; Robert M. Liddell, MD, a radiologist for Center for Diagnostic Imaging; and G.G. Comet Riggs, DVM, a veterinarian with practice limited to dentistry and oral surgery.

Named for being a **Very Important Primate**, Vip is the father of five daughters, including the zoo's youngest baby gorilla, 1-year-old Yola, and is known as the first zoo gorilla born in the Netherlands. Vip lives with his female companion, 32-year-old Jumoke, and his daughter, 9-year-old Uzumma.

The median life expectancy for male western lowland gorillas is 32 years old, although gorillas in zoos can live in to their 40s and 50s because of the evolving field of zoo medicine—improved husbandry and management techniques, excellent animal care, better nutrition, increased medical knowledge, and diagnostic and therapeutic techniques.

"Due to expanded life expectancies in many animals, including great apes, animals experience the aches and pains of getting older, just like aging humans. Vip has mobility issues, which is natural for his advanced age," said Collins. As part of his work-up, Vip also received complementary medicine in the form of laser therapy for his arthritis.



In addition to Vip's group, two other separate gorilla groups live at the zoo: 49-year-old Pete and 47-year-old Amanda; and 21-year-old female Nadiri, 39-year-old male Leonel, and Vip's daughters, 15-year-old female Akenji and 1-year-old female Yola.

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 100,000. There are four primary reasons gorillas are endangered. One is habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture. Poaching for 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; and climate change is causing the drying of the region, creating negative impacts on forest ecology and species.

Woodland Park Zoo supports conservation efforts for the western lowland gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study](#). To help support this important project, drop off used handheld electronics (cell phones, MP3 players, handheld games, e-readers, digital still and video cameras, laptops, GPS, portable hard drives, etc.) at the zoo. The handheld electronics will be turned over to ECO-CELL, which operates a strict NO LANDFILL program and reimburses organizations. ECO-CELL reuses mineral ore from these devices to reduce the demand for unsustainable coltan mining in the Congo that destroys habitat for critically endangered gorillas. The zoo will direct funds from ECO-CELL toward the Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study and other African conservation projects.

Learn more about the zoo's wildlife work in Africa and beyond at www.zoo.org/conservation.

Summer zoo hours: 9:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. daily. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

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