

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | August 15, 2018
Media contact: Gigi Allianic, Meghan Sawyer
206.548.2550 | woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org

Editor note: Visit the zoo's blog for more photos: <http://bit.ly/welcomekwame>

New gorilla to join Yola and family ***Male gorilla will step into critical leading role left vacant by death of Leo***

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo will welcome a new gorilla in September: an 18-year-old male named Kwame (KWA-may) who will move from Smithsonian's National Zoo.

The Gorilla Species Survival Plan made the recommendation to move Kwame to Woodland Park Zoo in order to provide stability and a natural grouping for one of the zoo's all-female groups: 2-year-old Yola, 22-year-old Nadiri who is Yola's mom, and 17-year-old female Akenji. The group was left without an adult male gorilla, known as a silverback, when 40-year-old Leo passed away suddenly in March. While Leo never had any offspring, he became a surrogate dad for Yola and a companion to Nadiri and Akenji. Since Leo's death, the zoo has been searching for another silverback to step into his role.

Silverbacks play a critical role in their groups, explained Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "They protect, they lead and they maintain peace. It's not natural for an established gorilla family to live without a silverback. Leo's passing away left a void that needs to be filled for the welfare of our female gorillas. We have high hopes we can successfully socialize Kwame into our group and that he can provide natural stability for his new family unit."

On arrival at Woodland Park Zoo, Kwame will live in the off-view gorilla dens where he'll immediately go through "howdy" introductions, which means he'll have regular visual access to his new group to ease his transition and help him become acquainted with the females. "Introductions between new gorillas take time and patience. We allow our animals to move at their own comfortable pace. As we do with all of our animal introductions, we'll follow the social and behavioral cues of our gorillas. We hope to have Kwame in the public outdoor exhibit in the fall," said Ramirez.

Kwame was born at National Zoo where he currently lives in a bachelor group with his younger brother, Kojo. Kwame's name originates from West Africa (Ghana and the Ivory Coast) and means "born on a Saturday" because Kwame was born on Saturday, November 20, 1999. He is nearly full grown at 315 pounds. "Kwame inspired all who knew him to care about this critically endangered species and will be greatly missed by the primate team, zoo staff, volunteers and visitors," said Meredith Bastian, curator of primates at Smithsonian's National Zoo.

In 2012, Kwame and his brother were the first western lowland gorilla recipients of Implantable Loop Recorders (ILR) through the [Great Ape Heart Project](#), which is at the forefront of studying and combatting heart disease in gorillas. About the size of a USB drive, the ILR records electrocardiogram waves and allows animal care staff to analyze trends in the gorillas' heart rates, rhythms, strengths and timing of electrical pulses. "Kwame's participation in the Great Ape Heart Project has contributed greatly to our efforts to better understand their cardiac health and the collected data will help benefit gorillas and other species as well. We are looking forward to Kwame's next chapter in Seattle, where he will be a capable and diplomatic leader of his new troop," added Bastian. Woodland Park Zoo also actively participates in this important project for great apes.

The other gorillas currently living in separate groups at Woodland Park Zoo are: 50-year-old male Pete, 48-year-old female Amanda, 39-year-old male Vip, 33-year-old female Jumoke and 10-year-old female Uzumma.



[Species Survival Plans](#) are conservation breeding programs across zoos accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) to help ensure healthy, self-sustaining populations of threatened and endangered species. Woodland Park Zoo participates in more than 108 Species Survival Plans. Led by experts in husbandry, nutrition, veterinary care, behavior, and genetics, the plans also involve a variety of other collaborative conservation activities such as research, public education, reintroduction and field projects.

Woodland Park Zoo supports conservation efforts for the western lowland gorilla and mountain gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study and Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund](#). To help support these important projects, the public can 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 are turned over to ECO-CELL, which operates a strict NO LANDFILL program and reimburses organizations for their recyclable contributions. 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 directs funds from ECO-CELL toward the Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and other great ape conservation projects.

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. Gorillas are endangered for the following primary reasons: habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture; poaching for the bushmeat trade, facilitated by logging, particularly in Cameroon; infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus which has 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.

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

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

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo's long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats through more than 30 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Each year, the zoo engages more than a million visitors of all ages, backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life in extraordinary experiences with animals, inspiring them to make conservation a priority in their lives and a difference in our planet's future ecological health and sustainability. Visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

###