

What's New at Woodland Park Zoo's Gorilla Exhibits? *Vip is back and Yola prepares to meet the new silverback!*

This summer and fall mark a number of changes to the Woodland Park Zoo gorilla exhibits. Visitors may notice an old familiar face has returned to the yard, and may also be wondering "Where's Yola?" As we prepare to welcome a new male gorilla in September, here are some of the changes visitors may observe at the zoo.



Vip is back!

Vip is back! After spending the past year recovering from surgery, 39-year-old Vip is back in the East exhibit yard.

Vip was born with an umbilical hernia and had no issues with it for the first 38 years of his life. In 2017, Vip began to show signs of discomfort, lethargy and lack of appetite. He was carefully monitored for several weeks by an expert team of zoo veterinarians and his keepers, who determined that the hernia was changing in size and shape.

Woodland Park Zoo veterinarians partnered with doctors from the University of Washington with specialized experience treating hernias in humans to develop a comprehensive care plan for Vip. In June 2017, he underwent hernia surgery and a dissolvable mesh was put in place to help keep the wound closed, similar to the way humans are treated following hernia surgery.

Over the following months, Vip was monitored and cared for by his health care team in a behind-the-scenes area to provide for his long recovery and safety. Unlike with humans, who can be instructed to rest or be confined to bed following surgery, Vip continued to be active and interact with two female gorillas, causing the dissolvable mesh to eventually break down.

Considering numerous variables including Vip's age, body weight, and social structure, his cross-functional medical team of zoo veterinarians and UW doctors have determined that conservative management is best for Vip instead of repeat surgical repair. Vip currently has a visible sore in the lower abdomen area where the mesh broke down.

Vip is under frequent observation and care by his keepers and veterinarians, who are watching for normal and abnormal behaviors, activity levels and signs of pain or distress. He is managing well and his condition is not interfering with his normal activities including eating, movement and bodily functions. This normal behavior is a positive indicator of his overall comfort. His sore is treated daily to protect him from infections and he is being trained to allow medical staff to perform ultrasounds on the hernia to track his progress and provide the best medical care depending on his needs.

Over the past month, Vip has been slowly reintroduced to the public exhibit in short intervals to evaluate his health and transition. As he is comfortable and transitioning well, his care givers have determined he is ready to return to the exhibit for full days in the company of 33-year-old female Jumokey.

Beginning this week, friends and fans of Vip are invited to visit the exhibit and welcome him back!

Where's Yola?

As the zoo plans to welcome 18-year-old male Kwame from Smithsonian's National Zoo in September, preparations are underway to help the female gorillas with the move.

Gorillas naturally establish groups in which several females live with one mature male, known as a silverback. The silverback protects the group and helps maintain stability and peace. Kwame will join a group of females at Woodland Park Zoo to fill the crucial role of silverback following the passing of 40-year-old Leo in March.

Prior to the new arrival, females from two groups at Woodland Park Zoo are being slowly and patiently introduced for the first time to form a new group in which Kwame will be the silverback. The all-female group left without a male following Leo's passing includes 2-year-old Yola, 22-year-old Nadiri, and 17-year-old Akenji. 10-year-old Uzumma, who has previously been part of Vip's group, is currently being introduced to the other females and will join them in Kwame's new group. The decision to transition Uzumma was made based on a Species Survival Plan recommendation through the Association of Zoos and Aquariums to provide her with breeding opportunities.

These female introductions are occurring in off-view gorilla dens under the careful management of the zoo's Animal Care team. When Kwame arrives in September, he will be slowly and safely introduced to his new family.

Yola, Kwame and the rest of the group are expected to return to the publicly-visible exhibit this fall.

To read more about Kwame and Woodland Park Zoo's conservation efforts around the western lowland and mountain gorillas, visit here: <https://www.zoo.org/document.doc?id=2401>.

The Endangered Species Act protects endangered animals, like gorillas, and is under threat by proposed changes that would significantly weaken protections for endangered species. These changes are open to public comment. To join Woodland Park Zoo in urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to rescind the proposed rule changes, visit: <https://www.zoo.org/esa>

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 35 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.

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