

PHOTO OPPORTUNITY

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Editor note: Please be advised that staff will not be available for interviews before the scheduled photo op on Friday, December 14.

Zoo rescues venomous reptiles from estate of local woman and 250 confiscated tarantula spiderlings from wildlife agency

- WHAT:** A couple of the rescued Gila monsters and a tank of the tarantulas will be available for photos in a meeting room at the zoo.
- WHEN:** **Friday, December 14, 1:00–2:00 p.m.**
- WHERE:** Center for Wildlife Conservation meeting room at Woodland Park Zoo. Meet PR staff at the West Entrance at Phinney Ave. N. between N. 55th & N. 56th Sts. Park in the Penguin Lot at N. 55th St. & Phinney Ave. N. or Otter Lot off N. 59th St. & Phinney Ave. N.
- WHO:** Animal Curator Jennifer Pramuk and Animal Care Manager Erin Sullivan will be on hand to answer any questions.



SEATTLE—A collection of reptiles owned by a woman who recently passed away in southern Wash. is now in the care of Woodland Park Zoo. The dozen exotic reptiles include several Gila (pronounced HEE-la) monsters, copperheads and vipers of various species.

Friends of the deceased woman asked the zoo if it could take the snakes and lizards. “As a community service, Woodland Park Zoo accepts all venomous reptiles, whether privately owned or confiscated by local agencies,” said Jennifer Pramuk, PhD, an animal curator at Woodland Park Zoo and an amphibian and reptile expert. “These people cared deeply for their friend who passed away and wanted to ensure that her animals went to a good home. We don’t want these animals to end up in the wrong hands or euthanized.”

The zoo plans to keep the Gila monsters and will work on placing the snakes in other zoos accredited by the [Association of Zoos & Aquariums](#) and which have staff highly qualified to care for these species. Gila monsters are one of two known venomous lizards, the other being the Mexican beaded lizard; they are native to the Southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico. Unlike snakes, Gila monsters and Mexican beaded lizards evolved their venom for defense, rather than for killing and digesting food. Although the Gila monster’s bite is normally not fatal to humans, it is extremely painful, and it is very important to see a doctor as soon as possible if bitten. Although Woodland Park Zoo stocks antivenom to provide accidental snakebite from all of the species of venomous reptiles in its collection, no antivenom exists for Gila monsters or for two African bush vipers that were part of the rescue.

In a separate recent case, the zoo rescued 250 tarantula spiderlings that were confiscated by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service from an importer. Because Brazil does not export adult tarantulas, it’s assumed the baby salmon pink bird-eating tarantulas and white-banded tarantulas were bred from illegally wild-caught adults.

Many animals, including reptiles and spiders, are threatened by the pet trade. Woodland Park Zoo works closely with wildlife agencies as a partner for consultation and providing a safe home on a case-by-case basis such as these two examples.

It is not uncommon for people seeking homes for unwanted pets to reach out to Woodland Park Zoo; however, zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, like Woodland Park Zoo, concentrate mainly on endangered species. Woodland Park Zoo can’t begin to absorb unwanted pets in need of homes and refers pet owners to several organizations in the

region including [Pacific Northwest Herpetological Society](#), [Northwest Exotic Bird Society](#) and [Pasado's Safe Haven](#).

"People don't realize that caring for wild animals is very challenging. Wild animals haven't been molded for life with humans, as domesticated animals have been. Exotic animals can be aggressive or unpredictable, pose health and disease problems, and have special dietary and environmental needs that many owners are not prepared to address. We encourage potential pet owners to seriously consider the many specialized needs of animals before owning an exotic pet," explained Pramuk. "For example, many turtle and parrot species have long life expectancies, living well into their 80s. People need to ask themselves if they can provide for the animals for their lifetime."

Zoo fall/winter hours: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. daily. The zoo is open every day except Christmas Day, December 25. For more information and to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park 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. The zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the wild through more than 30 field projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. 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. Visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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