

PRESS RELEASE

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Zoo's oldest gorilla recovering from veterinary exam to investigate critical geriatric issues

SEATTLE—Amanda, a 49-year-old female gorilla at Woodland Park Zoo, is recovering from a veterinary exam performed yesterday at the zoo. The medical procedure was administered to investigate recent geriatric issues. Amanda is the oldest western lowland gorilla currently living at the zoo and among the oldest in North America.



The medical exam was a part of Woodland Park Zoo's specialized geriatric care program. Amanda will remain in the off-view sleeping dens under close observation by the gorilla keepers.

A team of local radiologists and an ophthalmologist volunteered their time and expertise to examine the gorilla alongside the zoo's animal health team. The 213-pound gorilla was under general anesthesia for the exam which included a battery of tests, abdominal and cardiac ultrasounds, and diagnosis and treatment for visual issues.

Dr. Darin Collins, Woodland Park Zoo's director of animal health, said the exam revealed age-related concerns. "With the detailed eye exam now complete, we are closer to explaining the drooping of the upper eyelid. An injury to the cranial nerve that raises the upper eyelid muscle appears to be the probable cause. Degenerative changes in both retinas have caused the vision impairment," added Collins. "Samples were collected and tests are being conducted to better define a diagnosis to determine if treatment options are even possible."

Age-related degenerative changes involving the heart and major vessels, findings consistent with other gorillas and humans of this comparable age, were found during the ultrasound exam. "These findings may have an impact on cardiac function longer term," explained Collins.

Other than geriatric issues, life threatening concerns for Amanda were not found. "We are cautiously optimistic Amanda will fully recover, but due to her advanced age, we need to be prepared to address any added risks and potential complications in the days ahead," added Collins. "We are extremely grateful to the human medical team who donated their time for Amanda."

Many animal species are living longer in zoos largely due to the evolving field of zoo medicine. "Improved husbandry and management techniques, geriatric care, enhanced species-specific nutritional plans, medical breakthroughs, diagnostic and therapeutic techniques, and comprehensive enrichment programs have contributed to extending the life expectancies of animals in zoos," said Collins.

In zoos, female gorillas can live in to their 40s and 50s. In the natural range of gorillas, the life expectancy is 30 to 35 years.

In part to address the longer life expectancies for many animal species, Woodland Park 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 specific concern identified for an individual's health or well-being.

Amanda was raised at Toronto Zoo and has lived at Woodland Park Zoo since 1994. She has successfully raised three daughters, including Uzumma who is expecting her first baby in mid-March 2020.

“Our zoo family and community have long shared a special connection with our gorillas. But, like people, we have to accept that animals age,” said Nancy Hawkes, PhD, director of animal care at Woodland Park Zoo. “We’re pleased to report Amanda ate her entire breakfast today, a good sign of recovering. Our gorilla team will continue to shower her with a lot of extra love and be sure she remains comfortable.”

Amanda lives with 40-year-old male Vip and 34-year-old female Jumoke. Living in a separate group are Amanda’s daughter, 12-year-old Uzumma, 18-year-old male Kwame, 23-year-old Nadiri, 3-year-old Yola and 18-year-old Akenji, all females.

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, 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 300,000. Gorillas are endangered for the following primary reasons: poaching for the bushmeat trade; habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture; infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus which has recently become a great threat, killing many gorillas; and climate change, which is causing the drying of the region, creating negative impacts on forest ecology and species.

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

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