

PRESS RELEASE

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Orangutan Chinta, zoo's oldest animal, dies a day before 52nd birthday *Chinta is last remaining animal born at Woodland Park Zoo in the 1960s*

SEATTLE—*Chinta* (CHEEN-tuh), a female orangutan at Woodland Park Zoo, passed away peacefully this morning, one day shy of her 52nd birthday. She was the oldest animal currently living at Woodland Park Zoo and one of the oldest orangutans in North America.

The red-haired beauty was the last remaining animal born at Woodland Park Zoo in the 1960s who had lived at the zoo her entire lifetime. Chinta and her late twin brother Towan (toe-WAHN) were born in February 1968 at Woodland Park Zoo. Towan passed away in 2016.

Worldwide, Chinta and Towan gained instant celebrity status as the first-known twin orangutans born in a zoo. Photos of the pair as infants appeared around the globe, including in "Life" magazine. While other twins have since been born, twin orangutan births are still a rare occurrence.

Chinta, who was easily recognizable by ragged bangs over her eyebrows, was a geriatric orangutan and in her sunset years. The median life expectancy for orangutans is 28 years although orangutans in zoos are living into their 50s because of the evolving field of zoo medicine, which includes geriatric care.

As a standard procedure, the zoo's animal health team has performed a necropsy (an animal autopsy) and the cause of death will be pending final pathology tests in several weeks.

Chinta means *love* in Indonesian. Like a superstar, she had adoring fans. "Chinta's passing is a deep, deep loss for our zoo family, especially for her keepers. Thanks to the dedication of her passionate keepers, Chinta lived a long, happy life and was well loved. She was a beautiful ginger and a doting auntie to her nephew, Heran," said Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo.

Thousands of orangutan enthusiasts and the local community joined the zoo at parties thrown for Chinta and Towan's 30th and 40th birthdays, and Chinta's 50th.

"For five decades, people loved Chinta. She was an extraordinary individual. Orangutans are struggling in the wild and Chinta became a true ambassador for her species. She and her fellow orangutans have inspired individuals to support different orangutan conservation efforts and make lifestyle changes, such as converting to purchasing items with [sustainable palm oil](#)," added Ramirez.

Over her lifetime, Chinta played a role in zoo-based research projects that have contributed to increased knowledge of orangutan reproductive biology and a growing commitment among zoos to support orangutan field conservation. In 1993, Chinta underwent the first-ever embryo transfer for an orangutan; donors were from a female and male orangutan that lived at the zoo temporarily for breeding. While it didn't result in a pregnancy, the procedure helped make remarkable headway for this reproductive technique on orangutans. And, for many years, Chinta had been a part of a long-term study on ovarian function in orangutans conducted by [Dr. Cheryl Knott](#), an orangutan scientist and a long-time conservation partner of Woodland Park Zoo.

When the zoo introduced a new male orangutan, Godek, in 2017, Chinta and he immediately bonded and became very close companions. Chinta assumed the role of surrogate grandmother and teacher to this young orangutan, now 11. "However, because of his youth,



Godek was a little too rambunctious for Chinta at her age. To provide the best welfare for her, we more recently had her resting comfortably in an off-exhibit bedroom where the keepers could closely monitor her food and water intake. She was showered with lots of TLC from her keepers and even watched TV, which she really enjoyed,” said Ramirez.

In the last year, the elderly orangutan had been slowing down some and appeared to tire more easily. “Chinta had experienced intermittent bouts of bladder infections, and had underlying kidney insufficiency, so we kept a close watch on her urinary health as well as more general health indicators,” said Dr. Tim Storms, an associate veterinarian at Woodland Park Zoo.

Like many animals at Woodland Park Zoo, Chinta was well trained in a variety of behaviors that allowed her to actively participate in her own day-to-day care, including proactive geriatric care. “Thanks to the diligent training and attentive care by the orangutan keepers, her behaviors included allowing her teeth to be brushed, sitting still for stethoscope monitoring, providing urine samples, presenting her forehead for temporal thermometer readings, and allowing access to parts of her body for visual and physical examinations,” explained Ramirez.

In order to provide comprehensive care, orangutan keepers and veterinary staff were focused on training Chinta for voluntary blood draws and possibly ultrasound. According to Storms, “since anesthesia carries additional risk for any geriatric patient, we tried collecting as much health data as we could without sedation.”

In addition to Chinta, two female orangutans currently live at the zoo: 48-year-old Melati and 38-year-old Belawan, daughter of Towan and Melati.

The two male orangutans at the zoo, who share the same birthday as Chinta, are: Heran, son of Towan and Melati, turning 31; and Godek, turning 11.

Orangutans, a critically endangered species, belong to the family Hominidae, which includes all four great apes: gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and orangutans. There were previously two distinct species of orangutans known—the Bornean orangutan and Sumatran orangutan native to the islands of Borneo and Sumatra in Southeast Asia. In 2017, a third species was announced—the Tapanuli orangutan found in Sumatra.

Human overpopulation, logging, agriculture, conversion of forests to unsustainable monocultures, and other human activities are rapidly destroying forest environments required by orangutans for survival. This palm oil guide features companies that are committed to sourcing certified, sustainable palm oil: www.zoo.org/palmoil.

Visit <https://www.zoo.org/orangutans> to learn more about saving orangutans.

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