

PRESS RELEASE

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Editor note: See more on the zoo's blog at <http://bit.ly/birthwatch>

Birth watch begins for pregnant gorilla, Uzumma ***First-time expectant mom is due in early to mid-March***

SEATTLE— Woodland Park Zoo is excited to announce that the birth watch for a pregnant western lowland gorilla, Uzumma (uh-zum-ma), has started. The due date for the mom-to-be is between March 8 and March 20.



During the overnight birth watch, zoo volunteers monitor the expectant mom via cameras installed in Uzumma's bedroom. During the nightly shifts, the volunteers collect data and look for any telltale signs of behavioral changes to indicate the onset of labor. A gorilla keeper is on call each night to respond if Uzumma goes into labor overnight. The watch will continue until the birth.

The gestation period for gorillas is eight to nine months, similar to humans.

The birth will be the first for 12-year-old Uzumma. The expectant father is 20-year-old Kwame (KWA-may), who was introduced to Uzumma and her three female companions in 2018 when he moved from Smithsonian's National Zoo.

The last birth of a gorilla at Woodland Park Zoo was Yola, a female gorilla born in November 2015.

"It's always an exciting time preparing for the birth of a gorilla. Gorillas are social animals, so baby gorillas are enriching for gorilla families. It will be fun to see Yola with a new playmate closer to her age" said Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "We look forward to continue to grow our multi-generational gorilla family here at Woodland Park Zoo."

Woodland Park Zoo's renowned successful gorilla breeding program and its birth management plans include pre- and post-natal care plus any anticipated complications and proposed solutions should things take a downturn. "Our pre-natal care for Uzumma has included regular veterinary check-ups, a diet created by a nutritionist, supplemental vitamins to help her maintain a healthy weight for a normal delivery and ultrasound exams," said Ramirez.

The gorilla keepers have implemented a training program to help ensure Uzumma has a full-term pregnancy and delivers a healthy baby. The training sessions are done in the off-view bedrooms and the keepers and gorilla are always separated by a protective barrier.

Using positive reinforcement, the pregnant gorilla participates in her non-invasive ultrasound exams. "Uzumma has the choice to participate or not in her own pre-natal care. Because of the excellent training, we don't need to put her under anesthesia, which can pose its own set of potential stress or risks," said Dr. Darin Collins, director of animal health at Woodland Park Zoo.

According to Stephanie Jacobs, a gorilla keeper at Woodland Park Zoo, there are many unknowns with an inexperienced mom, so training for maternal behaviors is also critical. . The keepers have been using different objects as a "baby" to train Uzumma to pick up and hold anything keepers point to and call "baby" to her chest. "These training sessions help reinforce what will hopefully be Uzumma's natural understanding of how to pick up and correctly position the baby for nursing," explained Jacobs. "Uzumma really enjoys her training sessions and often solicits them with a vocal cue, which sounds like a cough, toward her

keeper. Uzumma not only enjoys the interaction and challenge of behavioral training, but the grape rewards she receives as well.”

If supplemental feedings become necessary for the baby, the keepers have trained Uzumma to bring the burlap baby to the mesh wall between the gorillas and keepers. “These trained behaviors will allow us to provide medical care or supplemental nutrition, if needed,” added Jacobs.

For the first few days after the birth, mom and baby will be under a 24-hour watch to closely monitor for successful bonding, carrying and nursing. “Having Uzumma raise her baby is a high priority. We want to be hands off without staff intervention. However, if there are any nursing issues or the baby appears to have medical concerns, we will need to intervene,” said Ramirez.

In addition to Uzumma, the other females in Kwame’s group are: 24-year-old Nadiri; 4-year-old Yola, the daughter of Nadiri; and 18-year-old Akenji.

The other gorillas living in a separate group at Woodland Park Zoo are: 41-year-old male Vip and 34-year-old female Jumoke.

Uzumma’s mother, 50-year-old Amanda, lives in the off-view bedrooms under geriatric care.

Uzumma and Kwame were paired under the Gorilla Species Survival Plan, which is a cooperative, conservation breeding program across accredited zoos to help ensure a healthy, self-sustaining population of gorillas.

Woodland Park Zoo participates in 111 Species Survival Plans, overseen by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. Led by experts in husbandry, nutrition, veterinary care, behavior, and genetics, these 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 Mondika Gorilla Project and [Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund](#). To help save gorillas, the public can drop off used handheld electronics at the zoo: cell phones, smartphones, iPods, iPads, tablets, adapters, chargers, MP3 players, handheld gaming systems and accessories that come with them. 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 Mondika Gorilla Project and Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund.

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

Winter zoo hours through April 30: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. daily. Save 30% off summer admission rates now through March 31: www.zoo.org/visit.

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