

## PRESS RELEASE

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Editor Note: Woodland Park Zoo is closed through March 31. Visit [zoo.org/health](http://zoo.org/health) for updates.

### Blueberry, zoo's popular ambassador hornbill, passes away

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo is mourning the loss of Blueberry, a female knobbed hornbill, who has passed away due to chronic advanced liver disease and other age-related concerns. Blueberry was 22 years old and was considered a geriatric bird.

Visit the zoo's blog for more photos: <http://bit.ly/GoodbyeBlue>

Knobbed hornbills are uncommon in zoos, with only about 23 in zoos worldwide.

Blueberry hatched in May 1997 at Woodland Park Zoo and was named after her favorite treat, blueberries! The statuesque bird lived in the zoo's Conservation Aviary where visitors could see her and learn about hornbills. In 2015, she transitioned to becoming an ambassador animal for the zoo.

As an ambassador animal, Blueberry joined other fellow [ambassador animals](#) at community events and schools throughout the region, participated in up-close experiences at the zoo, and made multiple in-studio appearances at various TV and radio stations. The zoo's ambassador animals help increase inclusion and participation among audiences who have previously experienced geographic, economic, cultural, or ability barriers, and offer programs that build connection, empathy, and respect and appreciation for wildlife.

"Blueberry thrived on human attention and people naturally gravitated toward her because of her beauty and charisma," said Rachel Salant, curator of ambassador animals at Woodland Park Zoo. "She loved being surrounded by crowds at zoo fundraisers and programs, and relished the attention of cameras pointed at her. Anyone who met Blueberry was charmed by her. This is a very sad time for us and we're going to deeply miss this beautiful bird."

Regina Smith, a lead ambassador animal keeper, took over the reins as Blueberry's primary animal keeper in 2017 after the keeper who cared for her retired. "Blueberry was mischievous and smart, but also snuggly and up for just hanging out," said Smith. "I made it a priority every day to spend time with her doing the things she enjoyed most such as basking in the sun on our theater stage, getting head scratches, and riding in her crate—she loved going off-roading, the bumpier the better! This is a hard loss but we're so grateful for the countless smiles she brought to each of us."

Like many animals at Woodland Park Zoo, Blueberry 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. According to Dr. Tim Storms, an associate veterinarian at Woodland Park Zoo, the hornbill had been intensively treated and monitored for liver disease, anemia, and low iron levels over the last few years. "Blueberry was also on a prescribed physical rehabilitation plan to maintain her muscle strength as she aged. She was a cooperative patient that would patiently allow us to collect blood samples every few months to monitor her health, while enjoying head scratches," said Storms.

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.

Hornbills are notable as being one of the most magnificent bird groups in Asian tropical forests, and are also found in Africa and India in varying habitats. Knobbed hornbills are native to the Indonesian islands of Sulawesi, Lembeh, Togian, Muna and Buton; they are



spotted easily due to their distinctive facial colors and markings. While hornbills are omnivorous, their diets are mainly fruits and figs; they are important seed dispersers in their habitats. A vulnerable species, the primary threat of knobbed hornbills is habitat destruction due to logging.

Woodland Park Zoo supports hornbill research through Conservation Partner, [Hutan](#). The organization studies hornbill breeding ecology in Kinabatangan in Borneo, restoring and monitoring artificial and natural nests, and improving protections for the critically endangered helmeted hornbill.

In addition, Woodland Park Zoo contributes to hornbill nest adoptions in Thailand with conservation associate, the Hornbill Research Foundation. The project subsidizes local villagers in conserving hornbills by protecting them and their nests. Villagers collect biological and ecological data for research purposes and monitor long-term hornbill populations in the area.

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

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