

PRESS RELEASE

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Zoo builds special sunning yard for its oldest and blind gorilla, Amanda ***Netted area enables gorilla to spend time outdoors in the sunshine***

SEATTLE—A new sunning yard has been specially constructed for Amanda, a 50-year-old female gorilla at Woodland Park Zoo, who has been living in the off-view dens due to age-related blindness and other degenerative issues.



The zoo's gorilla care and exhibits staff teamed up to devise a way that would allow Amanda to be outdoors for part of each day as she chooses. "We created a 72-square-foot outdoor space outfitted with furnishings that gorillas love, such as firehose and cargo netting attached with stainless steel anchor bolts and clips," said John Borgmeyer, exhibits manager at Woodland Park Zoo.

The design offers flexibility and allows the gorilla keepers to easily set it up for Amanda, then take it down before letting the other gorillas into the habitat. The enclosure is installed in the northeast corner of the east habitat that allows for good sun exposure and direct access from the indoor dens.

Amanda will be in the outdoor enclosure on a rotational schedule at optimal times when the sun hits this corner of the habitat. While she is physically separated from the other gorillas, she remains in close proximity so she can hear, smell and vocally interact with them.

Amanda is the grandmother of the zoo's newest baby gorilla, a male born March 4. She is the oldest western lowland gorilla living at the zoo and among the oldest in North America.

Amanda's loss of sight was confirmed last November when a team of local radiologists and an ophthalmologist volunteered their time and expertise to examine the gorilla alongside the zoo's animal health team to investigate geriatric issues.

Because of her visual impairment, Amanda could no longer safely navigate the public outdoor habitats; since last fall, she had been living in the off-view, indoor dens to allow the gorilla keepers to monitor her closely every day and meet her special needs. However, this change in her routine meant the geriatric gorilla was limited to being indoors only for her safety.

"As the science of animal care continues to evolve and animals in zoos are living longer, we're driven to learn, change, and adapt so that all of our animals receive the best possible care throughout every stage of their lives—infant, adolescent, adult, breeding adult and geriatric adult," said Nancy Hawkes, PhD, director of animal care at Woodland Park Zoo. "Providing optimal lifelong care requires innovative thinking and, in Amanda's case, creating an enriched sunning area in the gorilla habitat that gives her an opportunity to be outside and get fresh air and sunshine, while still maintaining her safety, which is important for her well-being."

The age-related blindness has necessitated changes in how the gorilla team takes care of Amanda and ensures her safety. "To help Amanda find her way to sleeping areas, hay, daily meals and treats, the keepers tap bamboo sticks on the doors or shake a small container of peanuts. They patiently guide her moving forward in small steps to make sure she isn't confused," explained Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "Amanda still has social interaction with other gorillas and her human caretakers through sounds, smell and touch."

The other gorillas at Woodland Park Zoo live in two groups. Group one: 20-year-old male Kwame; and females 24-year-old Nadiri, 4-year-old Yola, 18-year-old Akenji, and 12-year-old

Uzumma and her 2-month-old son. Group two: 41-year-old male Vip and 34-year-old female Jumoke.

Please visit www.zoo.org/relief to help support the animals at Woodland Park Zoo. While the zoo is temporarily closed to the public, the exceptional animal care and veterinary teams, and other staff continue to work to provide dedicated care to more than 900 animals. As a non-profit organization, the zoo is relying on the community now more than ever to help these wonderful animals continue to thrive. Contributions, both big and small, will help creatures of all sizes.

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