

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release | September 17, 2021

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Media download link for photos and video, including time-lapse video of artificial tree construction:

<https://zoo.resourcespace.com/?c=3536&k=918f6879c0>

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Komodo dragon exhibit reopens and it's better than ever for the giant lizards

SEATTLE—*Komodo dragons. They're reptilian icons. They're rare. They're the largest lizards on the planet. And, visitors can discover these ambush predators at Woodland Park Zoo where two male Komodo dragons live.* Their home has reopened after being closed all summer while undergoing extensive upgrades to improve their welfare, increase exhibit sustainability and enhance the visitor experience.



Woodland Park Zoo opened its Komodo dragon exhibit in 2000 with all the necessary comforts to meet the standards of care for the lizards. "However, in two decades we have come to understand the husbandry for these animals has advanced significantly and we needed to make changes to their home to ensure it evolves and matches the current state-of-the-art care for the species," said Kevin Murphy, an animal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. "The renovations are based on the latest science to better meet the needs of our Komodo dragons."

As cold-blooded animals, Komodo dragons rely on external heat sources to regulate body temperature. Hot spots (heat sources) are interspersed throughout their home on a basking rock and under logs. Ultraviolet heat lights are deftly concealed by new artificial logs and climbing structures created by the zoo's talented in-house design team. An innovative tree root area has been added to encourage natural behavior such as digging and tunneling. New glass offers better viewing for a more immersive experience for visitors.

Komodo dragons, native to Indonesia, are solitary animals, so each of the zoo's three dragons has its own space in the renovated exhibit. "The upgrades are all essential elements that our dragons need to stay healthy while also supporting more efficient energy use," added Murphy. "We can control all the lighting, temperature, humidity, and ventilation conditions throughout the Komodo spaces, so we can effectively manage the environment to meet the needs of the Komodos. As the science of animal care continues to evolve, we strive to continue to learn, change and improve so all our animals receive the best possible care throughout their lives."

In addition, the building's glass atrium roof has been replaced with a new insulated metal roof system. The new roof will provide a very long service life and is expected to save the zoo \$5,000 to \$8,000 per year in natural gas costs, along with 20 to 40 tons of carbon emissions per year.

Zoo-goers can visit the two male Komodo dragons—4-year-old Nakal and 8-year-old Berani—in the zoo's Adaptations Building.

The Komodo dragon improvement project was made possible with generous support from Seattle voters, the Seattle Park District, The Sunderland Foundation, and John and Sarah Cook.

The upgraded Komodo dragon exhibit reopens as the International Union of Conservation Nature (IUCN) announced last week that it has reclassified Komodo dragons as Endangered. The species was previously considered Vulnerable. The primary threat: climate change. IUCN warns that in the next four decades, the world's largest lizards will lose suitable habitat by at least 30 percent due to the rising temperatures and sea levels associated with climate

change. On the island of Flores, the lizards are in conflict with human residents as they compete for deer and boars, their normal prey; the carnivorous lizards also are considered a threat to cattle, goats and other livestock.

Kool Komodo Dragon Bites

- *They're exclusive.* An endangered species, Komodo dragons are restricted to four islands within Komodo National Park in southeastern Indonesia—Komodo, Rinca, Gili Montang, Gili Dasami—and the island of Flores. Their adaptability to survive as the top predator on only five islands and their hunting prowess have evoked both wonder and awe from throughout the world.
- *They're big.* Komodo dragons are the largest and heaviest lizards in the world. Adult males can reach lengths of 9 feet, females 8 feet. The largest ever measured was 10 feet, 2½ inches. They can weigh more than 200 pounds, but typical weights for adults are 100-150 pounds. But even dragons start small—hatchlings are only about 15 inches long.
- *They're powerful predators.* A Komodo dragon can eat up to 80 percent of its body weight in food at one meal, dining on deer, horses, water buffalo, pigs, rats and other animals. A large dragon can kill a deer twice its weight or a water buffalo three times its weight. They often scavenge carcasses and can sense a dead carcass from about 5 miles away. Komodos have large, serrated teeth (like a shark's) that they use to grip prey and rip open its flesh.
- *They're rare.* Scientists estimate that only about 3,000 to 4,000 remain in their natural range. Komodo dragons continue to be threatened by forest clearing, arson and trapping of prey species, such as the Timor deer.

How to help Komodo dragons

- Woodland Park Zoo supports the Komodo Dragon Survival Program in Indonesia. Visiting the zoo and zoo memberships help support the zoo's more than 35 wildlife conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world.
- To help Woodland Park Zoo contribute information to sustainable breeding, husbandry and public awareness of the Komodo dragon, adopt the species through the zoo's [ZooParent](#) program.

Woodland Park Zoo offers a safe, outdoor experience for all. Zoo hours through September 30: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. daily. Go to www.zoo.org/visit for tickets.

For more information on Woodland Park Zoo, visit www.zoo.org and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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