

PRESS RELEASE

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Media contact: Gigi Allianic, Alissa Wolken
206.548.2550 | woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org

Zoo's oldest gorilla to undergo dental procedure ***Geriatric male is the great-grandfather of baby gorilla Yola***

SEATTLE—Pete, a 49-year-old western lowland gorilla at Woodland Park Zoo, will be anesthetized this weekend for a dental procedure. The 385-pound ape is one of the oldest male gorillas in North America and the great-grandfather of the zoo's newest gorilla, 1-year-old Yola.

The procedure is being done to investigate a potentially infected tooth or other related issues, said Dr. Darin Collins, Woodland Park Zoo's director of animal health. "Because of Pete's past history with an infected tooth, a swollen face and a reduced appetite, we suspect he could have another infected tooth that isn't visible to us. We need to immobilize him for diagnosis and treatment. We have him on a prescribed program of antibiotics and analgesics while keeping him under close observation," said Collins.

The median life expectancy for male western lowland gorillas is 32 years old, although gorillas in zoos can live in to their 40s and 50s because of the evolving field of zoo medicine—improved husbandry and management techniques, excellent animal care, better nutrition, increased medical knowledge, and diagnostic and therapeutic techniques.

According to Collins, a 49-year-old gorilla is well into advanced geriatric age. "Essentially, it is nearly double in human years. Because of his age, anesthesia for the geriatric patient is a high risk. However, not addressing his health issues is potentially life threatening so an examination and possible treatment is the best option to intervene on his behalf," said Collins. Pete was last anesthetized in 2014 for a dental procedure.

The procedure on Pete will be performed at the zoo's Animal Health Complex where Collins and the zoo's animal health staff will work alongside a team of human dental and medical specialists—all volunteering their time and expertise—including endodontist Dr. Edmund Kwan, Kwan Endodontics; dentist/oral surgeon Dr. Roger Chin; radiologist Dr. Robert M. Liddell, Center for Diagnostic Imaging; Greg Davis, M.D., M.P.H., University of Washington associate professor of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery and Director of Rhinology and Endoscopic Skull Base Surgery; Neal D. Futran, M.D., D.M.D., Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery Center at UW Medical Center; ophthalmologist Dr. Tom Sullivan, Animal Eye Clinic; and veterinary dentist and oral surgeon Dr. G.G. Comet Riggs.

"Because of expanded life expectancies in many animals, including great apes, animals experience the aches and pains of getting older, just like aging humans," said Martin Ramirez, Woodland Park Zoo's curator of mammals. "Pete has mobility issues so he's more sedentary than he used to be, which is natural for his age."

The zoo has a formal process to evaluate quality of life daily, sometimes multiple times daily, over the course of weeks or months once there is a concern for an individual's well-being.

Pete has lived at Woodland Park Zoo since 1969. He and Nina were the foundation of the zoo's gorilla program and were lifetime residents and companions; the pair produced four offspring together, which have played an important role in producing future generations for the gorilla conservation breeding program in North American zoos. Pete has 19 grandchildren, seven great-grandchildren, including the zoo's newest baby gorilla, 1-year-old Yola, and one great-great-grandchild. Nina passed away in 2015 due to age-related health issues.

"Pete is known by his keepers as the 'gentleman of gorillas.' Because of his gentleness and stature of being an excellent father and grandfather, our staff, volunteers, members and



guests have had a lasting emotional connection with this special gorilla. While we're cautiously optimistic Pete will do well during the procedure and he can be back in the exhibit quickly, we're planning for other potential outcomes," said Ramirez.

Pete currently lives with 47-year-old female Amanda, who has lived at Woodland Park Zoo since 1994. After Nina's passing, Amanda was moved from her group to live with Pete so he wouldn't be alone. The gorilla zookeepers conduct visual checks a couple times daily due to their advanced ages. "They take note of each gorilla's mobility levels, appetites and fluid intake, how responsive their eyes are, and the condition of their gums, teeth and jaws," said Ramirez.

Two other separate gorilla groups are currently in Woodland Park Zoo's care: 21-year-old female Nadiri, 39-year-old male Leonel, 15-year-old female Akenji and 1-year-old female Yola; and 38-year-old male Vip, 31-year-old female Jumoke and 9-year-old female Uzumma.

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 100,000. There are four primary reasons gorillas are endangered. One is habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture. Poaching for the bushmeat trade, facilitated by logging, has become an immediate threat to the western lowland gorilla population, particularly in Cameroon. Additionally, infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus have recently become a great threat, killing many gorillas; and climate change is causing the drying of the region, creating negative impacts on forest ecology and species.

Woodland Park Zoo supports conservation efforts for the western lowland gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study](#). To help support this important project, the zoo is accepting used handheld electronics (cell phones, MP3 players, handheld games, e-readers, digital still and video cameras, laptops, GPS, portable hard drives, etc.). The handheld electronics will be turned over to ECO-CELL, which operates a strict NO LANDFILL program and reimburses organizations. 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 will direct funds from ECO-CELL toward the Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study and other African conservation projects.

Learn more about the zoo's wildlife work in Africa and beyond at www.zoo.org/conservation.

Zoo hours: 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily through April 30. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500.

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