

PRESS RELEASE

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Read more about the surgery and see photos on the zoo's blog:
http://blog.zoo.org/2017/03/zoo-vets-perform-surgery-on-lizard-that_15.html

Zoo veterinarians surgically remove bladder stone from lizard that weighs less than a pound

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo's veterinary team pulled a "MacGyver" by custom-making a critical breathing tube for a very small lizard, a male chuckwalla named *Misho*. The creative problem-solving allowed the team to perform surgery and remove a bladder stone from a lizard that weighs under a pound. At 25 years old, Misho is a geriatric chuckwalla.

Chuckwallas are lizards native to the southwestern U.S. and northern Mexico, and typically measure 11 to 18 inches long. Like many plant-eating reptiles, chuckwallas enjoy basking on rocks in the sun and eating leafy greens.

As part of the zoo's exemplary animal care program, the zoo's veterinary team was called in after zookeepers recently noticed the lizard showed signs of lethargy. A diagnostics exam—listening to the heart and lungs, drawing blood, feeling the abdomen and administering radiographs—confirmed Misho had grown a giant bladder stone.

"That's a *really* big stone in a very small lizard," said Dr. Kelly Helmick, Woodland Park Zoo's associate veterinarian, after looking at the radiograph. "That's probably why Misho didn't feel well. As the stone shifted around, it made him uncomfortable and affected his day-to-day quality of life. It was clear it had to go."

According to Helmick, anesthetizing lizards isn't easy. "They can go minutes without breathing, making it harder for the gas to take effect. That, plus our reptilian friend's small size, also makes inserting a critical breathing tube challenging," explained Helmick.

No one manufactures a breathing tube small enough to fit the chuckwalla, so the zoo's veterinarians resourcefully custom-made their own out of other materials for him and other animals his size. "Everything about this surgery is miniature. Some of the things we need for surgery and anesthesia just aren't made that small, so we adapt and make our own," said Helmick.

The bladder stone, which accounted for nearly 3% of the lizard's entire body weight, was successfully removed and Misho is recuperating under the attentive care of zookeepers and veterinary staff. The lizard currently lives in temporary housing which is off view to the public since a fire in December 2016 damaged the Day and Night Exhibit building where he lived.

"It's part of the fun of being a zoo veterinarian," said Helmick. "We provide the best care for our patients regardless of their size!"

Zoo winter hours: 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. daily. Visit www.zoo.org for information and how to become a member.

Accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums, award-winning Woodland Park Zoo is famed for pioneering naturalistic exhibits and setting international standards for zoos in animal care, conservation and education programs. Woodland Park Zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. By inspiring people to care and act, Woodland Park Zoo is making a difference in our planet's future. For more information, visit www.zoo.org.

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