

## PRESS RELEASE

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Media contact: Gigi Allianic, Meghan Sawyer  
206.548.2550 | [woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org](mailto:woodlandparkzoo@zoo.org)

### **Zoo shares news of joy: a pregnant gorilla! First-time mom-to-be is due in January 2020**

SEATTLE— Uzumma (uh-zum-ma), whose name means “bearer of joy to the family” in the African language Igbo (ee-boo), has lived up to her name and brings more joy to Woodland Park Zoo: the western lowland gorilla is pregnant for the first time! The expectant father is 18-year-old Kwame (KWA-may).

Uzumma, who turns 12 in October, has just ended the first trimester of her pregnancy and is due to give birth in mid-January 2020. The gestation period for gorillas is eight to nine months, similar to humans.

The last birth of a gorilla at Woodland Park Zoo was Yola, a female gorilla born in November 2015.

Woodland Park Zoo is renowned for its successful gorilla breeding program and its excellent birth management plans, including pre- and post-natal care. To help ensure a successful pregnancy and birth, the pre-natal care includes regular veterinary check-ups leading up to the birth, a diet created by a nutritionist, supplemental vitamins to help Uzumma maintain a healthy weight for a normal delivery and ultrasound exams.

The gorilla keepers have worked hard to understand their animals. As part of Uzumma’s pre-natal care program, they have trained Uzumma to participate in non-invasive ultrasound exams that will take place in the gorilla bedrooms. “Conditioning Uzumma to offer trained behaviors for ultrasound exams is integral to ensuring a full-term pregnancy and a healthy baby. This important training will allow her to freely participate in her own pre-natal care and eliminates the need for anesthesia, which poses its own set of potential stress or risks,” said Dr. Darin Collins, director of animal health at Woodland Park Zoo. “We’ll closely observe any behavioral changes and perform ultrasound exams periodically throughout the next four months.”

Kwame, the father-to-be, was introduced to Uzumma and her three female companions a year ago when he moved from Smithsonian’s National Zoo. He was chosen by the Gorilla Species Survival Plan in order to provide stability and a natural grouping for this all-female group who had been left without an adult male gorilla, known as a silverback, when Leo passed away in March 2018.

The Gorilla Species Survival Plan is a cooperative, conservation breeding program across accredited zoos to help ensure a healthy, self-sustaining population of gorillas.

Kwame stepped into his role as silverback, which is to protect, lead and maintain peace among his group, explained Martin Ramirez, mammal curator at Woodland Park Zoo. “Everything lined up for socializing Kwame with this group of females. Their personalities, dynamics and mutual respect for one another were key,” said Ramirez.

All of the females in Kwame’s group have breeding recommendations by the Gorilla Species Survival Plan. “We took Uzumma off birth control pills in the spring and let nature run its course,” said Ramirez.

The zoo’s gorilla team considered several factors in choosing Uzumma to be the first to breed. “Because her own mother, Amanda, was very attentive, nurturing and protective of her babies, we’re confident Uzumma will pick up her mom’s maternal style which, like humans, are often learned behaviors,” said Ramirez. Being adventurous and mischievous, Uzumma



also has a lot of energy. “We’re hoping that once she has a baby, she will channel that energy into being a great mom and being a role model for the other females in her group, especially the inexperienced females.”

The gorilla care team will prepare for every possible scenario. “There are many unknowns with an inexperienced mom. In addition, Kwame’s group is relatively newly socialized, living together for only a year. We are hopeful a baby will be enriching for the entire group but we have to be ready for any possible outcomes and plan carefully,” explained Ramirez.

In addition to Uzumma, the other females in Kwame’s group are: 23-year-old Nadiri; 3-year-old Yola, the daughter of Nadiri; and 18-year-old Akenji.

The other gorillas living in a separate group at Woodland Park Zoo are: 40-year-old Vip, the silverback of the group; and 49-year-old Amanda and 33-year-old Jumoke, both females.

Woodland Park Zoo participates in 111 Species Survival Plans, overseen by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums. Led by experts in husbandry, nutrition, veterinary care, behavior, and genetics, these plans also involve a variety of other collaborative conservation activities such as research, public education, reintroduction and field projects.

Woodland Park Zoo supports conservation efforts for the western lowland gorilla and mountain gorilla through the [Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study](#) and [Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund](#). To help support these important projects, the public can drop off at the zoo used handheld electronic gadgets: cell phones, smartphones, iPods, iPads, tablets, adapters, chargers, MP3 players, handheld gaming systems and the accessories that come with them. The handheld electronics are turned over to [ECO-CELL](#), which operates a strict NO LANDFILL program and reimburses organizations for their recyclable contributions. 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 directs funds from ECO-CELL toward the Mbeli Bai Gorilla Study, Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund and other great ape conservation projects.

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 300,000. Gorillas are endangered for the following primary reasons: poaching for the bushmeat trade; habitat destruction caused by logging, mining, and slash and burn agriculture; infectious diseases such as the Ebola virus which has recently become a great threat, killing many gorillas; and climate change, which is causing the drying of the region, creating negative impacts on forest ecology and species.

To support Woodland Park Zoo's outstanding animal care and welfare, please consider joining Woodland Park Zoo for **All for Animals Giving Day on October 2, 2019** to protect wildlife, inspire future generations and support care for animals. Your donation matters, and for the zoo’s first-ever Giving Day, eight campaigns give you the option of how you want to support your zoo. Visit [givingday.zoo.org](http://givingday.zoo.org) to make your gift and make a difference. Early giving is now open.

For more information or to become a zoo member, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) or call 206.548.2500.

Zoo hours October 1–April 30: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. daily.

Save 30% off summer admission rates now through March 31. Visit [www.zoo.org/graydays](http://www.zoo.org/graydays) for information.

Founded in 1899, Woodland Park Zoo engages more than a million visitors of all ages,

backgrounds, abilities, and walks of life in extraordinary experiences with animals, inspiring them to make conservation a priority in their lives. The zoo is helping to save animals and their habitats in the wild through more than 35 wildlife conservation projects in the Pacific Northwest and around the world. Woodland Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos & Aquariums and certified by the rigorous American Humane Conservation program. The Humane Certified™ seal of approval is another important validation of the zoo's long-standing tradition of meeting the highest standards in animal welfare. Visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) and follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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