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## **A baby gorilla is on the way this summer! *Pregnant gorilla will be a first-time mom***

SEATTLE—Woodland Park Zoo recently tested one of its western lowland gorillas for pregnancy. Using the same type of an early-detection kit used for humans, the zoo is proud to announce the test results: **two pink lines**, which means a pregnant gorilla!

The expectant gorilla is 22-year-old Akenji (uh-KEN-jee), and this will be her first baby. Akenji is due to give birth the end of June or early July; the gestation period for gorillas is eight to nine months.

Is the pregnant gorilla showing a baby bump? “It’s hard to notice a belly bump because gorillas characteristically have big bellies due to the high volume of fibrous vegetation they digest,” said Rachel Vass, an interim animal care manager at Woodland Park Zoo. “However, our gorilla care staff notice she’s a little wider across her upper midsection and chest. Her belly is bigger, but the untrained eye could probably not detect the change.”

Akenji was born at Woodland Park Zoo. Her baby will be the third for the expectant father, Kwame (KWA-may), 24, who is the father of the last two gorillas born at the zoo: son Kitoko born March 2020 and daughter Zuna born January 2021.

Akenji’s mom, Jumoke, didn’t show appropriate maternal behaviors after giving birth to her. A matriarch gorilla living in another family at the zoo helped raise her as her own. Because Akenji was not raised by her own mom, the zoo’s gorilla staff have been taking extra measures to prepare her for raising her baby.

“To help ensure Akenji will bond with and raise her infant, we have been providing maternal skills training,” said Vass. “We’re target training Akenji to pick up a burlap ‘baby doll’ and bring it to her breast to practice feeding and also present it to gorilla staff if supplemental feedings become necessary.”

For gorillas, exposure to babies and young gorillas is especially beneficial for maternal skills development. Akenji has had quality exposure to infant gorillas and watching them grow, explained Vass. The youngsters in Akenji’s family group include 8-year-old Yola, 4-year-old Kitoko and 3-year-old Zuna. “Akenji is a laid-back gorilla and is playful and very social with the gorilla kids. You can often see her carrying Zuna on her back. This important exposure and interaction should play out to have important benefits of being a good mom to her own offspring,” added Vass.

Woodland Park Zoo has long had a successful gorilla breeding program and its birth management plans. Pre- and post-natal care include regular veterinary check-ups leading up to the birth, a diet created by a nutritionist and supplemental vitamins to help Akenji maintain a healthy weight for a delivery without challenges. In addition,



Akenji has been trained to voluntarily participate in non-invasive ultrasound exams, which will be performed periodically throughout the next several months.

The gorillas at Woodland Park Zoo currently live in two separate families. Group one: silverback (adult male gorilla) Kwame; adult females Nadiri, Akenji and Uzumma; juvenile females Yola and Zuna, daughters of Nadiri; and juvenile male, Kitoko, son of Kwame and Uzumma. Group two: silverback Nadaya; and adult females Jumoke, Olympia and Jamani.

### **Help gorillas in their natural range**

A portion of every visit and membership to Woodland Park Zoo supports saving wildlife in the Pacific Northwest and around the world including protecting western lowland gorillas. The Goualougo Triangle Ape Project aims to preserve wildlife in the Congo Basin by studying gorillas and chimpanzees, the ecosystems and the forces that threaten their survival. Local communities and indigenous people assist in directly addressing the challenges that impact great ape survival in this region.

Join the zoo by recycling old cell phones and other used handheld electronics through [ECO-CELL](#) to help preserve gorilla habitat. ECO-CELL operates a strict NO LANDFILL program and reimburses organizations for recyclable contributions. The community can bring used handheld electronics to drop-boxes located at both zoo entrances.

### **Become a Digital ZooParent to support gorillas**

Become a [ZooParent](#) and help Woodland Park Zoo provide exceptional care for all its amazing animals and support wildlife conservation efforts in the Pacific Northwest and around the world.

Winter zoo hours: 9:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m. daily. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit [www.zoo.org](http://www.zoo.org) or call 206.548.2500. Follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Accessibility: Information about accessibility and resources, one-to-one aides, sighted guides, mobility equipment rentals, and a sensory map and tools can be found at [www.zoo.org/access](http://www.zoo.org/access). For questions or to request disability accommodations for zoo programs or events, contact [zooinfo@zoo.org](mailto:zooinfo@zoo.org).

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