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Zoo announces an orangutan is pregnant ***Orangutan birth will mark the first for the zoo in 35 years***

SEATTLE—*Imagine looking skyward in the rain forest habitat of Sumatra and a hairy, ginger animal swings into view high up in the canopies. A closer observation reveals it's a mother orangutan and her infant tightly hanging on as she gracefully travels from tree to tree.* Not everyone can travel to Sumatra, but just a few months from now, this spellbound experience can become a reality because Woodland Park Zoo has a baby orangutan on its way!

For the first time in 35 years at Woodland Park Zoo, an orangutan is pregnant. The expectant mom is 14-year-old Batu (baw-too) and the father is 15-year-old Godek; both are Sumatran orangutans. Batu is due to give birth this summer in late August/early September and this will be the first offspring for both orangutans. The gestation period for orangutans is about nine months.

Batu, which means “rock” in Malay, arrived in 2021 from Philadelphia Zoo; Godek, whose name means “sideburns” in Indonesian, arrived in 2017 from Cheyenne Mountain Zoo (Colorado Springs, Colo.). The Sumatran orangutans were paired under a breeding recommendation by the Orangutan Species Survival Plan and have been companions in the zoo’s Trail of Vines. [Species Survival Plans](#) are cooperative breeding programs across accredited zoos to help ensure healthy, self-sustaining populations of threatened and endangered species.

Female orangutans only give birth every seven to nine years, which is an exceptionally long birth interval for a mammal. Among the great apes (orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos and humans), infant orangutans have the longest infant development period. They are completely dependent on their mom for the first three to four years while nursing and are carried by their moms. Mother orangutans become empty nesters when their babies reach about 7 to 8 years old.

“Batu doesn’t have direct experience being around a baby orangutan, but she was completely reared by her mother where she was born and, therefore, has good personal experience to draw from,” said Libby Lawson, an animal keeper at Woodland Park Zoo. “Batu’s intelligence, confidence and independent personality were most certainly nurtured by her mother. We believe her strong relationship with mate Godek and her mother’s mentorship have equipped Batu for this significant period in her life.”

“Establishing a successful breeding program, particularly for great apes, calls for careful planning including determining compatible personalities, helping them adjust to their new home and co-habitants, and having a cadre of expert animal care staff to establish a successful breeding program,” said Martin Ramirez, Interim Senior Director of Animal Care at Woodland Park Zoo. “A pregnancy is a very significant milestone for an orangutan and, while we have high hopes for Batu being a good mother and raising her infant, we’re also cautiously optimistic because this is her first



pregnancy. Our focus has been on providing Batu with the best maternal care program to increase her chances of carrying the fetus to full term and giving birth to a healthy infant.”

Ramirez explained that birth management plans for the zoo’s animals are very much like those for human women. “Pre- and post-natal care for Batu includes regular veterinary check-ups leading up to the birth, a diet created by a nutritionist and supplemental vitamins to help her maintain a healthy weight for a delivery to minimize any challenges.”

The zoo’s animal care team has also designed a maternal skills training program for Batu that is tailored for a first-time mother.

“Our goal is to arm Batu with as many skills possible to instill confidence and help her be a successful mother,” said Rachel Vass, an Interim Animal Care Manager at Woodland Park Zoo. “One scenario we need to prepare for is the newborn requiring bottle feeding. Our orangutan keepers are training Batu to retrieve objects, cuddle a burlap baby doll close to her chest, situate it higher or lower on her torso and allow a milk-filled bottle to be placed on her breast through the mesh. Orangutans are very intelligent animals and we’re pleased how Batu is progressing with her maternal training.” Batu is also being trained for non-invasive ultrasound without the need for anesthesia.

The zoo currently has four orangutans who live in two family groups: Batu and Godek share a habitat while 35-year-old male Heran and 43-year-old female Belawan (Bela) live in the other orangutan habitat. Heran was the last orangutan born at Woodland Park Zoo in 1989; his parents have since passed away.

There are three species of orangutans that are found only in Southeast Asia: the Bornean orangutan native to the island of Borneo, and Sumatran and Tapanuli orangutans native to the island of Sumatra. A critically endangered species, orangutans belong to the family Hominidae, which includes all five great apes: gorillas, chimpanzees, bonobos, orangutans and humans.

Orangutans face threats including habitat loss and fragmentation due to forest fires, logging, and conversion to unsustainable monocultures, such as palm oil plantations. Habitat loss is also projected to be exacerbated with climate change. Additionally, these animals are illegally hunted for meat and in response to human-wildlife conflict.

Give a hand to orangutans

- A portion of every visit and membership to Woodland Park Zoo supports saving wildlife in the Pacific Northwest and around the world including protecting orangutans. The zoo supports [HUTAN Kinabatangan Orangutan Conservation Program](#) and [Gunung Palung Orangutan Conservation Program](#).
- For sweet occasions, use this treat shopping guide to help save forests and wildlife, such as orangutans, a world away: www.zoo.org/palmoil. The list features companies that are committed to sourcing certified sustainable palm oil that is deforestation free.

- 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.

Current zoo hours: 9:30 a.m.–6:00 p.m. daily. For more information or to become a zoo member, visit www.zoo.org or call 206.548.2500. Follow the zoo on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#).

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. For questions or to request disability accommodations for zoo programs or events, contact zooinfo@zoo.org.

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