

**Media download link for photos:**

<https://zoo.resourcespace.com/?c=3965&k=74c3429fe4>

## **Birth watch begins for pregnant gorilla** ***First-time expectant mom due anytime to early July***

SEATTLE—Last month, Woodland Park Zoo released ultrasound images of a pregnant gorilla, Akenji (uh-KEN-jee). This week, the birth watch has officially started for her!

A birth watch for great apes typically begins a week before the birth window opens and can span two to three weeks. The gestation period for gorillas is about nine months.

The birth watch means Akenji is now under 24-hour monitoring. Overnight, zoo volunteers observe Akenji remotely on cams installed in her bedroom, collect data such as behavioral changes and sleeping pattern and look for any telltale signs that might indicate the onset of labor. A gorilla keeper is on call to respond in case Akenji goes into labor in the middle of the night; during the day, routine care for all the zoo's gorillas continues with an extra close watch on her when she's in the outdoor habitat with her family.

Akenji, 22, was born at Woodland Park Zoo. This will be her first baby and the third for the expectant father, Kwame (KWA-may), 24. Kwame is the father of the two youngest gorillas born at the zoo: son Kitoko born March 2020 and daughter Zuna born January 2021.

"Every birth of a gorilla is exciting for the zoo family and our community. We've seen hundreds of zoo members and visitors gather at the gorilla habitat seeking out Akenji and her pregnant belly," said Rachel Vass, Interim Animal Care Manager at Woodland Park Zoo. "While gorillas characteristically have big bellies because of the high volume of fiber in their diet, Akenji's belly is noticeably bigger, especially when she's resting on her side. As Akenji nears parturition, she's more tired. We've prepared her as much as we can for a successful birth and to provide good maternal behavior, especially as a first-time mom."

Woodland Park Zoo is home to two families of western lowland gorillas. 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**

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.

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](http://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](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).

###