

PRESS RELEASE

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Photo credit

Baby gorilla: Woodland Park Zoo

Gorilla Akenji: Jeremy Dwyer-Lindgren/Woodland Park Zoo



Gorilla Akenji gives birth to her first baby ***Newborn is currently being hand-reared by gorilla staff***

SEATTLE—Following a nine-month gestation period, the release of ultrasound images, a birth watch that began two weeks ago, and a flurry of excitement around its pregnant gorilla, Woodland Park Zoo is proud to announce that Akenji (uh-KEN-jee) gave birth on June 28, 2024 at 10:30 a.m. (PT) to her first baby...*and it's a boy!*

The zoo's gorilla and animal health staff closely observed the birth and post-birth behaviors in the off-view bedrooms. Unfortunately, Akenji did not show appropriate maternal behaviors despite the months-long maternal skills training the gorilla care team provided.

Within an hour after delivery, the animal care team intervened for the baby's safety and well-being. A neonatal exam was performed to ensure the yet-to-be-named infant was healthy. "The average weight for a gorilla at birth is 4 pounds and we're pleased to report our new boy weighs 4.4 pounds. His vital signs are good and he is healthy and physically normal," said Dr. Yousuf Jafarey, Associate Veterinarian at Woodland Park Zoo.

Throughout the weekend gorilla staff provided round-the-clock care for the newborn such as bottle-feeding human infant formula, providing comfort and keeping him warm. In between feeding sessions, the baby was kept within proximity in a warm bedding of hay to allow Akenji short visits and opportunities to bond or within line of sight so she could see, hear and smell him.

"Although we have been encouraging maternal behaviors, Akenji still hasn't shown any promising signs of interest to bond with her baby. Because she demonstrated capable maternal behaviors throughout her training program, we're disappointed and a little surprised those instincts haven't kicked in," said Rachel Vass, Interim Animal Care Manager at Woodland Park Zoo. "As we continue to hand-rear her baby for the short term, the positive news is that he remains healthy, he has a great appetite and strong grip, and he is getting bigger every day."

The newborn represents the 16th gorilla born at Woodland Park Zoo and the third offspring for the father, Kwame (KWA-may). His other children are son Kitoko born March 2020 and daughter Zuna born January 2021, who live in the same family as Akenji.

The short-term plan is for the gorilla staff to continue caring for the baby gorilla and offering opportunities to unite mother and son.

“We have a professional, highly dedicated team of gorilla experts at Woodland Park Zoo who have more than eight decades of collective experience caring for and breeding gorillas, preparing expectant moms for motherhood, and uniting moms and infants or introducing other gorillas to step in as moms,” said Martin Ramirez, Interim Senior Director of Animal Care at Woodland Park Zoo. “The present situation calls for us to exercise patience and be methodical as we move forward with this new member of our gorilla family,” said Ramirez.

Akenji and her family will be in the viewable outdoor habitat mid-morning to mid-afternoon while her baby remains in the off-view dens. For updates, visit www.zoo.org/zoobabies.

Woodland Park Zoo is home to two families of western lowland gorillas. Group one: silverback (adult male gorilla) Kwame, father of the new baby; adult females Akenji, Nadiri 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. Adopt a gorilla by becoming 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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